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Subtitling *How I Met Your Mother*:
The Transfer of Verbal Humor into Finnish

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ABSTRACT:

Yleisin ja monimuotoisin audiovisuaalisen kääntämisen muoto Suomessa on tekstittäminen. Tekstittämisen käännösratkaisuja ohjaavat aika- ja tilatekijät korostuneemmin kuin muuta kääntämistä. Tekstityskäännöksessä ruudulla näkyvä teksti poikkeaa alkukielisestä dialogista aina jollakin tavalla, jotta ohjelma toimisi tekstitettynä kohdekieliselle yleisölle. Tekstitetyssä ohjelmassa alkukielinen puhe on kuultavissa myös kohdekielisessä audiovisuaalisessa tekstissä. Näin ollen alkukieltä ymmärtävät katsojat kykenevät vertaamaan puheen sisältöä ja tekstitystä.

Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa selvitettiin mitkä ovat yleisimmät huumorin kääntämisessä käytettävät käännösstrategiat ja kuinka paljon lähdetekstin huumoria on mahdollista siirtää kohdetekstiin. Tutkimuksessa sovellettiin James S. Holmesin säilyttävää ja uutta luovaa käännösstrategiaa. Tutkimuksen oletus oli, että säilyttävä strategia on ilmeisempi valinta kääntäjälle, sillä tekstittämisessä tiivistäminen ja uskollisuus lähdetekstille rajoittavat kääntäjän luovuutta. Tutkimuskohteeksi valittiin amerikkalainen tilannekomediasarja *How I Met Your Mother*, suom. *Ensisilmäyksellä*, joka sisältää tekstittäjän työtä haastavaa verbaalista huumoria. Materiaaliksi muodostuivat sarjalle tyypillisimmät sanaleikit ja alluusioiden alakategorioineen.

Säilyttävä käännösstrategia osoittautui oletuksen mukaisesti yleisemmäksi käännösstrategiaksi kuin uutta luova strategia. Yllättävää oli, että tekstittäjät olivat onnistuneet kääntämään vain alle puolet lähdetekstin huumorista. Tiivistäminen ja kohdekielen ominaisuudet rajoittivat käännösmahdollisuuksia. Tämä tulos tukee päätelmää, jonka mukaan huumorin kääntäminen kahden täysin erilaisen kielen välillä on erittäin haastavaa.

KEYWORDS: allusion, humor, re-creation, retention, subtitling, wordplay

1. INTRODUCTION

The world around us is full of translations. Even our everyday lives are mostly constructed of translations. We use translated texts tens of times a day, for instance, in the form of advertisements and news articles, and we translate the world around us in order to make it comprehensible to us. Often this happens completely imperceptibly. The region of Finnish language is narrow and thus there has been, and always will be, a great demand for translated texts (Aaltonen, Siponkoski, Abdallah 2015: 7-12). In addition to other types of translated texts, in Finland there is a considerable demand for audiovisual translations as well.

Nowadays a great amount of films and television programs are imported from foreign countries. Thus, subtitling and dubbing has become increasingly important. In two of the Finland's biggest commercial television channels, *MTV3* and *Nelonen*, foreign television programs and films are the majority of the entire television repertoire. *MTV3* broadcasts altogether 94 television series from which, a notable 79%, consists of foreign television series (MTV3 2016). *Nelonen* broadcasts all in all 59 television series from which 40% consist of foreign television series (Nelonen 2016). In 2015 a total of 202 films premiered in cinema in Finland and 40 of these were Finnish feature films. The rest 80% consisted of foreign films. (Suomen elokuvasäätiö 2016) These foreign television series and films are subtitled or dubbed for the Finnish audience.

In Finland, the two main types of audiovisual translation, subtitling and dubbing, have different audiences. Films and television programs are usually subtitled whereas dubbing is mainly used in translating children's programs and films, such as animations and family films (Zatlin 2005: 125). Thus, in Finland subtitling is the favored form of audiovisual translation. According to De Linde and Kay (1999: 1), subtitles are commonly used in other European countries as well, such as Portugal, Greece, Wales, Holland, Luxembourg, Ireland, and in the Nordic countries. Countries such as France, Germany, Britain, Spain and Italy favor dubbing over subtitling. De Linde (1999: 1) further argues that the decision on which method of the two types of audiovisual translation to choose from is often based more on economic considerations rather than cultural characteristics. Countries with relatively a smaller number of viewers and, thus

limited financial resources, tend to favor subtitling over dubbing since it is the cheaper translation method. Larger countries tend to favor dubbing, even though it is the more expensive alternative, because dubbing can potentially attract larger number of viewers as it allows the audience to focus on the visual elements on the screen.

Translators face diverse challenges in subtitling television programs and films. In addition to the restrictions of time and space the mode of translation causes, translators often deal with specialized terminology, dialects and accents, culture-specific items such as names or different types of verbal humor. Particularly humor is a notable challenge for a translator as it is often based on linguistic and cultural issues. (De Linde 1999: 6–13) The situation comedy *How I Met Your Mother* is a good example of a television program that creates challenges for a translator. The series contain plenty of verbal humor, especially, in the form of wordplay and allusions. According to Delabastita (1996: 133-134), occasionally verbal humor can be easily transferred from one language to another, but often it is nearly impossible to retain a specific type of humor in the target text. When a translator cannot retain a specific type of humor of the source text, it can be, for example, replaced with another type of humor in the target text. Thus, the program or a film does not lose its humorous effect. If the verbal humor cannot be retained or re-created it will be lost. According to Leppihalme (1996: 214), translators have several tools in their disposal and the decision on which of them to utilize is usually based on the cultural issues of the target language.

As comedies are a popular genre, many scholars have studied the transfer of humor in audiovisual translation. For example, Thorsten Schröter (2005) has studied how language play occurring in English-language feature films is treated in the dubbed and subtitled translations of the films. Schröter's study is one of the largest in the field of translation studies when it comes to the number of instances featuring language play and the number of times various language-play strategies have been employed. His corpus comprised of 18 family films and 99 of their various target versions on DVD, and contained nearly 800 source-text instances of language-play and thousands of translation solutions. The possibility of preserving the humor of the source text in the dubbed and subtitled translations was proved to be challenging in the study. Schröter

(2005: 366) concluded that the original language play was preserved to somewhat similar extents in both types of audiovisual translations, but when the entire corpus of language-play were analyzed, the results revealed that dubbed versions transferred more of the original language-play than subtitled versions. Schröter (2005: 367–369) continued that the results indicated that especially two sets of factors were likely to influence the translation: the type of the language-play and the identity and working conditions of the translators. By contrast, the type of audiovisual translation, the target language, or the general properties of the films could not be shown to have a significant impact on the translations. In addition, it seems that the extensive amount of material impacted the depth of the analysis. Schröter (2005: 369) estimated that the fact that he only analyzed short and usually disconnected sequences of text in detail, and that these only constituted a small percentage of the overall amount of text contained in the films, could have influenced the results. He continues that many aspects of the source texts were disregarded, and most of the target versions had not been scanned in their entirety for language-play that is independent of source text elements, and that he did not analyze the translation choices that had nothing to do with language-play. He pointed out that this might have resulted in losing sight of the other qualities of the material that was being analyzed.

The aim of this thesis is to study further the case of transferring verbal humor from the source text to the target text. Contrary to Schröter's (2005) study that compared the transfer of humor in both subtitling and dubbing, my study focuses solely on the transfer of humor in subtitling. The material consists of 42 episodes of the American situation comedy *How I Met Your Mother*. The series is about a group of close friends living in New York and humor is a central theme of the series. The aim is to investigate which translation strategies the translator has used in order to transfer the verbal humor of the original soundtrack into the subtitles (from the source text to the target text), how much of the verbal humor of the source text can be preserved in the target text, and how much creativity is used in the translation process.

In order to analyze the transfer of verbal humor in my material, I will utilize a model of translation by James S. Holmes (1988: 47–48). In the model, Holmes divides translating

into two strategies of retention and re-creation. When a translation is exoticizing and historicizing, it is considered as *retention*, whereas when a translation is naturalizing and modernizing, it is considered as *re-creation*. In other words, retentive translation strategy stays close to the source text, and reveals the foreign origin in the target text. Whereas re-creative strategy brings the translation closer to the target culture and thus allows the translator to be more creative. According to Holmes (1988: 48), the translator has to choose between retentive and re-creative translation strategies in order to produce an acceptable translation. In this study, the translation strategies used by the translators of *How I Met Your Mother* will be categorized as either retention or re-creation on the basis of how they transfer the verbal humor of the source text to the target text. Translation strategy is categorized as retention of humor if the translator has preserved the humor of the source text in the subtitles without changing the original type of humor. In order for a translation strategy to be categorized as re-creation of humor, the humor of the source text has to be translated by using a different type of humor than the original. In case the humor cannot be retained or re-created it is categorized as lost and if the humorous instance has not been translated at all, it is categorized as omitted.

The assumption in this thesis is that the translator's aim is to preserve the humor of the source text in the target text. As was mentioned earlier, a central theme of *How I Met Your Mother* is humor, and therefore, the main assumption is that humor has a central role in the translation as well. Translating verbal humor is likely to cause challenges for the translator, and the humor of the source text might need modification in order to work in the target language and culture. According to Schröter (2005: 53), without the interference of the original dialogue, dubbing gives the translator more freedom than subtitling, and thus allows for more creativity as well than subtitling. In particular, in dubbing problematic passages can be altered completely without it having an effect on comprehensibility or the originally conceived function. Schröter (2005: 53) continues to argue that subtitling is less prone to censorship because the original soundtrack remains unaltered, and viewers who understand the source language have a possibility to examine the translation in terms of textual loyalty. In addition, they can also choose to concentrate primarily on the original dialogue and largely disregard the translation. Schröter's arguments would support an assumption that the retentive translation strategy

would be more frequently used, than the re-creative translation strategy, in the translation of humor in *How I Met Your Mother*.

The material and the method of this study will be presented in more detail in the following subsections. Chapter 2 focuses on humor and its definition, and discusses wordplay, allusions and situation comedy in greater detail. Chapter 3 concentrates on types of audiovisual translation and restrictions of subtitling. Chapter 4 discusses translatability of humor and presents the translation strategy of retention and recreation by James S. Holmes (1988: 47–48). Chapter 5 presents the analysis of translation of verbal humor in *How I Met Your Mother* and the main findings. Chapter 6 presents conclusions.

1.1. Material

The material of this study consisted of first and third season of an American situation comedy *How I met Your Mother* on DVD with its Finnish subtitles. I chose the series as my material because it contains plenty of verbal humor, and thus it is an ideal material for this type of study. The original dialogue and transcript in English were used as the source text and the subtitled Finnish translation as the target text. The first season of *How I met Your Mother* consists of 22 episodes and the third season has 20 episodes, all in all, I watched 42 episodes of the series. Duration of an episode is approximately 22 minutes. The first season of *How I Met Your Mother* is translated by Sari Tenhunen and the third season by Taru Alin.

In order to study the translation strategies used in transferring verbal humor from the source text to the target text, the most significant types of humor in *How I Met Your Mother* were identified. Humorous instances were first collected from the original dialogue and the transcripts of the series and then from the subtitled Finnish translations. After the collection, humorous instances were categorized. Two categories of humor arose as the most significant means of creating verbal humor in the series: *wordplay* and *allusions*. There were 101 instances of wordplay identified in the source text and 39 instances of allusions, a total of 140 instances of verbal humor.

The two most significant types of humor studied in this theses, wordplay and allusions, were further divided into more detailed subcategories. Wordplay included five different types. First type of wordplay is *polysemy* which is play on a word with several meanings (Delabastita: 1996: 128). There were 46 instances of polysemy in my material. The second type of wordplay is *homonymy* which is play on words with identical pronunciation and spelling (Delabastita: 1996: 128). My material contained 2 instances of homonymy. The third type of wordplay is *homophony* which is play on words with identical pronunciation but different spelling (Delabastita: 1996: 128). There were 6 instances of homophony in my material. The fourth type of wordplay is *paronymy* which is play on words with similar pronunciations and spelling (Delabastita: 1996: 128). A total of 31 instances of paronymy were found from my material. The last and fifth type of wordplay is *nonce words* which are invented words, usually used just for a particular occasion (Schröter 2005: 267). My material contained 16 instances of nonce words.

In this study, allusions were further divided into two subcategories of pure allusions and allusive puns. My material contained a total of 39 instances of allusions of which 25 were categorized as pure allusions and 14 as allusive puns. According to Leppihalme (1997: 10), *pure allusions* are unmodified allusions which contain key-phrase references or proper-name references in unmodified forms. Whereas *Allusive puns* are modified allusions which contain proper-name references or key-phrase references in altered forms. Thus, allusive puns usually contain wordplay. Leppihalme (1997: 10) explains that a *proper-name reference* contains a proper name whereas a *key-phrase reference* does not contain a proper name but a phrase that alludes to one.

The following subchapter introduces the method of this study and presents the translation strategies used in order to investigate the transfer of verbal humor from the source text to the subtitles of *How I met Your Mother*.

1.2. Method

The assumptive hypothesis of this study was that the retentive translation strategy would be more frequently used than the re-creative translation strategy in the translation

of humor in *How I Met Your Mother*. This was based on the arguments made by Schröter (2005: 53) in his study that compared the transfer of language-play in dubbing and subtitling. According to him, dubbing as a form of audiovisual translation offers more freedom for the translator to be creative than subtitling, because subtitling is less prone to censorship than dubbing since the original soundtrack remains unaltered, and viewers who understand the source language have a possibility to examine the translation in terms of textual loyalty. As a result the translator might prefer using retentive translation strategy instead of re-creative translation strategy when translating verbal humor from the source text to the subtitles of *How I Met Your Mother*.

In order to analyze how the verbal humor of the source text has been transferred into the target text, the translation strategies used by the translators of *How I Met Your Mother* were divided into two categories of retention and re-creation on the grounds of how the verbal humor is translated. This categorization originates from James S. Holmes (1988: 47–48). When a translation is exoticizing and historicizing, it is considered as *retention*, in other words, retentive translation strategy stays close to the source text and reveals the foreign origin in the target text. When a translation is naturalizing and modernizing, it is considered as *re-creation*, in other words, re-creative strategy brings the translation closer to the target culture, and thus allows the translator to be more creative in the translation process. According to Holmes (1988: 48), the translator has to choose between retentive and re-creative translation strategies in order to produce an acceptable translation.

The focus of this study is the transfer of verbal humor from the original soundtrack to the subtitles. The attention is especially on which translation strategies the translator has used in order to transfer the humor, whether the translator has been able to preserve the same type of humor in the source text, or whether another type of humor has been used in order to make the translation possible. The analysis of this study was carried out by categorizing the translation strategies that were used in the transfer of seven different types of verbal humor found from my material. The categories are retention of humor, re-creation of humor, loss of humor, and omission of humor.

In this study, translation strategy is categorized as retention of humor if the translator has preserved the humor of the source text in the subtitles without changing the original type of humor. In order for a translation strategy to be categorized as re-creation of humor, the humor of the source text has to be translated by using a different type of humor than the original. Sometimes translators have to make choices at the cost of other element, such as verbal humor. Verbal humor is a challenging feature and sometimes it is impossible to transfer to the target text. Thus, in addition to retention and re-creation of humor, also loss of humor and omission of humor were included in the translation strategies of this study. In case the verbal humor has not been transferred, in other words retained or re-created, it is categorized as loss of humor. A completely untranslated instance of humor is categorized as omission of humor.

The following subchapter closing this introductory chapter will briefly discuss the storyline of the situation comedy series *How I Met Your Mother*.

1.3. How I Met Your Mother

How I Met Your Mother is an American situation comedy, which originally aired on CBS from the year 2005 to 2015. The show gained great success with over 9 million viewers per episode for each of the nine seasons. (Daily News 2014) *How I Met Your Mother* has won 10 Emmy Awards out of a total of 30 nominations (Television Academy 2015). In Finland *How I Met Your Mother* airs on channel Sub and it is called *Ensisilmäyksellä* [at first glance]. Sub is currently airing the ninth and final season of the series. (MTV 2015) *How I Met Your Mother* is known for its shameless humor and its target audience is mainly young adults.

The first season of *How I Met Your Mother* starts with a scene in the year 2030 when a 52-year-old Ted Mosby gathers his daughter and son to tell them the story of how he met their mother. This future-set frame is the present day of the show and every episode begins with Ted starting to tell a story to his children. The story begins back in 2005 with Ted as a 27-year-old single architect living in New York. The narrative deals with the adventures of Ted and four of his best friends: Marshal, Lily, Barney, and Robin. Ted lives together with her best friends from college: Marshal Eriksen, a law student,

and his girlfriend of nine years Lily Aldrin, a kindergarten teacher. In the first episode Marshal and Lily get engaged and this makes Ted to dream about marriage and the possibility of finding a soul mate. Ted's friend Barney Stinson, a serial womanizer, cannot stand the idea of commitment and tries to get Ted to embrace his singlehood. Barney cannot persuade Ted on his side and, thus Ted begins his relentless search for a girl of his dreams. He meets a young reporter, Robin Scherbatsky, to whom he immediately falls in love. However, their relationship does not last and the two become good friends. The show focuses on all of Ted's prior relationships, thus setting the stage for his eventual happiness with the mother of his children. *How I Met Your Mother* does not introduce his wife and mother to his children until the last episode of the ninth and final season. (Wikia 2015) The following chapter discusses the main theme of *How I Met Your Mother*, humor, in more detail. Definitions of humor are presented and the main types of verbal humor from my material, which are wordplay and allusions, are discussed with examples. In addition, situation comedy and typical characters of situation comedy are briefly discussed

2. HUMOR

Situation comedies, such as *How I Met Your Mother*, are strongly based on humor. According to Palmer (1994: 1–3), “humor is everything that is actually or potentially funny, and the processes by which this funniness occurs”. Humor is part of our personality and cognitive and emotional processes. It is also subject to social rules governing appropriate behavior on different occasions and it is subject to moral and aesthetic judgment. Humor is a challenge for every theoretical approach because it is a multi-dimensional issue. Therefore most scholars can agree on one thing: that is that humor is definitely not a simple issue and it cannot be defined easily.

Chiaro (1992: 5) defines humor in terms of effect: humor is whatever has a humorous effect. When a person laughs or smiles, we have humor, but same things are not funny to everybody. According to Chiaro (2011: 372), humor is directly linked to our emotions and what someone may or may not consider humorous will depend on their personality coupled with how they are feeling at that certain moment. Just as the same comic stimuli are not humorous to all individuals, it is equally unlikely that they will be just as funny across all cultures. Humor is a cultural thing and the rules of where and when it is appropriate to laugh and smile openly can differ greatly from culture to culture. For example, in western countries, verbal humor is considered as an icebreaker, a social paste and something that is a positive attribute in a person, but this is not the case in all cultures. Despite cultural differences, there are jokes that are considered funny universally. It is discovered that all cultures worldwide make use of an underdog as the butt of a joke. Chiaro (1992: 6) continues that generally humor does not travel well and the concept of what people find funny appears to be surrounded by linguistic, geographical, diachronic, sociocultural and personal boundaries. These boundaries make studying verbal humor, such as wordplay and allusions, problematic. The notion of humor and what makes people laugh has intrigued scholars of various disciplines for centuries. Philosophers, psychologists and sociologists have attempted to define the whys and wherefores of humor, and above all, its essence. Such studies have resulted in numerous theories on the subject, some of more convincing than others. In order to study the verbal humor of *How I Met Your Mother*, a theoretical framework of humor

needs to be discussed. The following subchapter presents the three most general categories of humor theories. After that wordplay and allusions, which are the main types of verbal humor in *How I Met Your Mother*, are introduced and illustrated with examples from my material. Subchapter 2.4 briefly discusses situation comedy and subchapter 2.4.1 focuses on typical characters of situation comedy.

2.1. Defining Humor

There are many definitions of humor by different scholars. In order to identify and study verbal humor of *How I Met Your Mother*, general theories of humor needs to be discussed. According to Critchley (2002: 2–3), there are three general categories of humor theories and they focus on different aspects of humor. First category of these humor theories is the *superiority theory*. In the superiority theory, represented by Plato and Aristotle, we laugh from feelings of superiority over other people. This theory dominated the philosophical tradition until the eighteenth century. Attardo (1994: 49) clarifies that the superiority theory concerns the social aspect of humor and laughing at somebody who is referred to as the butt of the joke. This type of humor rises from a sense of superiority and hierarchy. For example ethnic humor, such as the Americans making fun of the Canadians and vice versa, is based on superiority. In *How I Met Your Mother* Robin is Canadian and the rest of the characters, who are Americans, often tease her about her nationality and make fun of her accent.

The second category of humor theories is the *release theory*. According to Critchley (2002: 2–3), it emerged in the nineteenth century and laughter was explained as a release of pent-up nervous energy. The theory is best known in the version given by Sigmund Freud in 1905, where the energy that is relieved and discharged in laughter provides pleasure because it allegedly economizes upon energy that would ordinarily be used to contain or repress psychic activity. Attardo (1994: 50) explains that the release theory explores the essence of humor more deeply than the other two humor theories because it focuses on humor as a psychoanalytical phenomenon. According to Critchley (2002: 3), humor can give rise to a bodily phenomenon, such as a smile or laughter, which involves a certain amount of loss of self-control as the break between the person

and their body. The main theme of *How I Met Your Mother* is humor and thus its main function is to release tension and provide pleasure for the viewer.

The last and third category of humor theories is the *incongruity theory*. It was originally presented in Kant and Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard's work. Critchley (2002: 3) explains that the incongruity theory is cognitive in nature, and in the theory, humor is produced by the experience of a felt incongruity between what is known or expected to be the case, and what actually takes place in the joke. The following dialog from my material demonstrates an example of humor based on incongruity. In my examples season is shortened as S and episode shortened as E. In this scene Ted and Barney are heading to the airport:

(1) S1E3

Ted: Why do you have those suitcases and who are we **picking up**?

Barney: I don't know. Maybe her. Or her...

Ted: Wait, so when you said you were gonna **pick someone up** at the airport, you meant you were going to **pick someone up** at the airport?

The humor of the example arises from the incongruity of the scene. Ted thought that they were going to the airport in order to give somebody a ride home, but Barney meant that they would go to the airport to flirt with girls. In this example, verbal humor is created by a double meaning, which caused confusion.

In addition to the above categories of humor theories, it is essential to briefly discuss verbal humor, since it is the main focus of this study. Attardo (1994: 32) makes a distinction between *referential humor* and *verbal humor*. According to him referential humor depends only on the meaning of the words in the joke, while verbal humor depends also on the verbal form of the words involved in the joke. In other words, if the disjunctive of the joke changes and the joke remains funny, it is considered as a referential joke. Whereas if the joke loses its humor, it is considered as a verbal joke and its humor depends upon the specific words in which it is formulated. Attardo (1994: 32) includes verbal jokes in the overall category of verbal humor, which includes any humor that is expressed through spoken language, words or text. This can include items based on ambiguity, such as wordplay, and non-ambiguity based items, such as

alliteration. Dynel (2009: 120) uses the term *linguistic humor*, in order to distinguish humor based on linguistic form from humor expressed merely through language. According to Dynel (2009: 120), “linguistic humor covers primarily punning, in which similar or identical structural features (homophony or paronymy, homony, homography and syntactic ambiguity) are exploited for the confrontation of two different meanings”. The main types of humor in *How I Met Your Mother* are based on ambiguity, and the humor of the series can be defined either as verbal humor or as linguistic humor since the humor depends both on the meaning and the form of the words involved in the jokes.

In this study, the above definitions of humor have been used as a tool to identify the most significant types of verbal humor in my material. The most prominent means of creating verbal humor in my material turned out to be wordplay in the forms of polysemy, homonymy, homophony, paronymy and nonce words. The second largest type of verbal humor in my material proved to be allusions in the form of allusive puns and pure allusions. In the following subchapters wordplay and allusions are discussed with examples from my material.

2.2. Word Play

The most significant type of verbal humor in *How I Met your Mother* is wordplay, which is not surprising since wordplay is one of the most popular types of verbal humor and the most studied subject in linguistic humor research as well (Attardo 1994: 46). According to Delabastita (1993: 56), there is no single universally applicable definition of wordplay or a pun. Puns have merited the attention of scholars from all over the world and they have been approached from diverse angles in multiple academic disciplines, each addressing a different aspect of punning production and submitting its own terminological apparatus. In *Oxford Dictionary of English* (2010) pun is recognized as “a joke exploiting the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words which sound alike but have different meanings”. Delabastita (1996: 128) refers to wordplay the following way:

Wordplay is the general name for the various *textual* phenomena in which *structural features* of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a *communicatively significant confrontation* of two (or more) linguistic structures with *more or less similar forms* and *more or less different meanings*

Seewoester (2011: 71) explains that the humorous power of puns comes from ambiguities apparent in their language of origin. Some puns rely on ambiguity of sound and some rely on ambiguity of word meaning, while others rely on ambiguity of syntactic interpretations in context. It is the intertwining of co-text, linguistic form, and meaning that enables the phenomenon of punning. Additionally, issues of salience of alternative meanings, length and strength of context, and correspondence of world knowledge between the pun producer and receiver play roles in how successful a punning interplay can be. For humorous puns, incongruity, novelty, and surprise can affect the level of amusement realized in the execution of a pun.

Delabastita (1996: 128) has categorized wordplay into four subcategories. All of these categories of wordplay appear in *How I Met Your Mother* as well. The first subcategory of wordplay is *polysemy* which is play on a word that has acquired several meanings, for example by means of a metaphor (Delabastita 1996: 128). The following example from my material demonstrates polysemy. In this scene, Barney is dressed in a green suit in honor of Saint Patrick's Day, as can be seen in the picture (picture 1.) below. He tries to persuade his friends to join him and come to the theme party at their local pub, but they refuse to come.

(2) S3E12

Barney: I'll celebrate St. Patty's Day by myself. I don't need you people.
You make me physically ill.

Lily: **He did look a little green.**



Picture 1. Barney celebrating Saint Patrick's Day in a green suit

The wordplay of this scene arises from Lily's comment which refers to both Barney's green suit and looking unhealthy pale in appearance. The second subcategory of wordplay is *homonymy* which is play on words with different meanings that happen to have identical pronunciation and spellings (Delabastita 1996: 128). The next example from my material illustrates homonymy. In this scene, Barney is desperate to find out the identity of the woman who is ruining his social life. Lily suggests that karma is finally catching up to him.

(3) S03E14

Barney: Some woman that I slept with and screwed over is trying to ruin my life. God, why is this happening to me?

Lily: It's **karma**.

Barney: Nah, it's not **Karma**. She's stripping in Vegas. Plus, we're good.

The wordplay of this scene arises from the misunderstanding when Barney thinks that by referring to karma Lily meant a dancer called Karma. The third subcategory of wordplay is *homophony* which is play on words with different meanings that have identical pronunciation but different spelling (Delabastita 1996: 128). The above

example from my material demonstrates homophony. In this scene Ted and Barney are at the airport and a female officer has invited them to her house for drinks

(4) S01E03

Ted: Who the hell is Sacha?

Barney: Sacha. She's having friends over for drinks at her house. It's gonna be **legen- ...wait for it...and I hope you're not lactose intolerant because the next part of the word is... dairy.**

The wordplay of this scene arises when Barney cuts the word *legendary* in half and makes the last part of the word sound like *dairy*. The forth subcategory of wordplay is *paronymy* which is play on words with different meanings that have similar but not identical pronunciation and spelling (Delabastita 1996: 128). The next example from my material illustrates paronymy. In this scene, Robin reveals to Barney that she likes Ted. Barney promises not to tell Ted about it because it is against the rules of the “bro code” that is the code of conduct among friends.

(5) S1E14

Robin: You're not gonna tell him, are you?

Barney: No. That's the bro code. A bro doesn't tell a mutual bro that a third bro has a crush on him. Just like the third bro doesn't tell the mutual bro that the original bro went bare pickle in front of her. **It's quid pro bro.**

The wordplay of this scene arises when at the end of his line Barney refers to a deal arranging a *quid pro bro* instead of a *quid pro quo*.

In addition to the four categories of wordplay discussed above, there is a fifth category of wordplay that appears in my material, and that is nonce words. According to Schröter (2005: 267), nonce words are invented specifically for a specific context and they “designate either a new concept that has no previous label or signifier or they denote an established concept that is not normally referred to with the particular arrangement of linguistic elements that the speaker uses”. Nonce words are created “for the nonce” and thus it can be difficult to determine what the new construct is supposed to mean. The

following example from my material demonstrates a nonce word. Ted has been single for a long time and in this scene Barney promises to teach Ted how to be more like him.

(6) S3E05

Barney: I'm teaching Ted how to live, and lucky you, I have room for one more student. Think of me as Yoda, only instead of being little and green, I wear suits and I'm awesome. I'm your bro. I'm **broda**. And tonight you are gonna use The Force to get the hottest chick in this bar into bed.

The wordplay of this scene arises when Barney refers to himself as the combination of a bro and the Star Wars character Yoda, and in consequence invents a nonce word *broda*.

There are a total of 101 instances of wordplay in my material, and thus wordplay represents the majority of the cases of verbal humor in my material. All of the categories of wordplay presented above appear in *How I Met Your Mother*. The second most typical type of verbal humor found from my material is allusions. The discussion of allusions follows in the next subchapter.

2.3. Allusions

The second most prominent means of creating verbal humor in *How I Met Your Mother* are *allusions*. According to Leppihalme (1997: 6), the definition of the term allusion is problematic and varies to a certain degree from scholar to scholar. Allusion is closely related to terms such as reference, quotation or citation, borrowing, as well as punning or wordplay. Allusion can be defined as:

a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing or idea of historical, cultural, literary or political significance. It does not describe in detail the person or thing to which it refers. It is just a passing comment and the writer expects the reader to possess enough knowledge to spot the allusion and grasp its importance in a text. (Literary Devices 2017)

Allusions can, thus, be brief references that the author expects the reader to recognize and understand. According to Nash (1985: 77), failure to appreciate the content 'element' undermines the allusion, and the humorous effect lapses if the textual form of the allusion goes unrecognized or is misunderstood. Leppihalme (1997: 4) clarifies that

allusions “presuppose a particular kind of receiver participation”. This means that the words of the allusion function as a clue to the meaning, but the meaning can only be understood if the receiver can connect the clue with an earlier use of the same or similar word in another source, or if the use of a name evokes the reference and some characteristic feature linked to that name. Leppihalme (1997: 4) further continues that some allusions have developed into clichés or been lexicalized so that they are no longer necessarily linked with their original sources. Allusions require a high degree of bicultural knowledge of receivers in order to be understood across a culture barrier. Leppihalme (1996: 199) emphasizes that allusions, and especially allusive wordplay, are so culture-specific that it is easy to miss them altogether, and this can cause prominent problems for translators as well.

Leppihalme (1997: 10) divides allusions into two categories of *proper-name allusions* and *key-phrase allusions*. In *How I Met Your Mother* both of these categories are represented. A proper-name allusion, just as the name suggests, contains a proper name. Key-phrase allusion does not contain a proper name but a phrase that alludes to one. Both of these categories can be further divided into *regular allusions* and *modified allusions*. Regular allusion are pure, unmodified allusions, whereas modified allusions contain a twist, that is, an alteration or modification of preformed material, this means that they usually contain wordplay in some form. In this study, a term pure allusion is used to describe unmodified allusion, and a term allusive pun is used to describe a modified allusion. My material contains 39 allusions of which 25 are pure allusions. This is example from my material demonstrates a pure allusion with a proper-name:

(7) S1E7

Barney: Last night, epiphany, I realized what the world of dating needs.
A Lemon Law.

Robin: A Lemon Law, like for cars?

Barney: Exactly. From the moment that the date begins, you have five minutes to decide whether they are going to commit to an entire evening. And if you don't, it's no hard feelings, just good night, thanks for playing, see you never.

In this scene, Barney, Robin and Ted are at the bar and Barney suggests applying a Lemon Law to dating. Lemon Law is an American law offering car buyers relief for defects detected after purchase (Merriam-Webster 2017).

The following example from my material demonstrates a pure allusion with a key-phrase:

(8) S3E12

Lily: I won again. Why do I keep winning?

Robin: Maybe your hippo is just **hungrier hungrier** than ours.

In this scene, Lily, Marshall and Robin are having a game night in Lily and Marshall's new apartment. They are playing a game where they throw marbles in the mouths of hippos. Lily does not know yet that the floor of the apartment is crooked and that is why she keeps winning constantly. Robin tries to hide the truth with a phrase that alludes to the name of the game that they are playing. The game is called Hungry Hungry Hippos.

The above examples were pure allusions and the allusive reference had not been modified or altered in any ways. In addition to pure allusions, *How I Met Your Mother* contains modified allusions as well. In this study, allusions that are modified in a humorous way are called allusive puns. My material contains 14 allusive puns. The following example from my material demonstrates allusive puns:

(9) S03E19

Ted: I totally pull them off! It's a classic Western look.

Marshall: Oh, okay, uh, today's category: classic Westerns that involve red cowboy boots. Ooh, ooh! Robin.

Robin: "**The Good, the Bad, and the Fabulous**"

Lily: "**The Magnificent Kevin**"

Marshall: "**No Country for Straight Men**"

In this scene, Ted's friends are making fun of his red cowboy boots because they think that they are not suitable shoes for a heterosexual man to wear. They start playing a

game where one has to invent allusions to classic Western movies, but modify them in a humorous way so that they sound like the characters might wear red cowboy boots. Robin starts and makes an allusive pun to a Clint Eastwood movie *the good, the Bad, and the Ugly* by replacing ugly with fabulous. Lily alludes to *The magnificent Seven* by replacing seven with Kevin, and finally Marshall alludes to a movie called *No Country for Old Men* by replacing old with straight.

A translator can choose among a wide range of translation methods when translating wordplay and allusions, but in order to select one of these methods, or even to start contemplating what might be at stake in a given choice, he or she will have to identify the instances of verbal humor from the source-text in the first place. The translator must have sufficient metacultural competence in order to recognize that the transfer of culture-specific items can be fraught with problems. Needless to say, if the translator misses the humor, he or she is hardly likely to try to find a creative translation for it. (Leppihalme 1996: 99–208)

2.4. Situation Comedy

Situation comedy, such as *How I Met Your Mother*, is a humorous storyline that places a group of characters in comedic situations, usually based on exaggerations of day-to-day occurrences. Situation comedy explores society and therefore it is even more dependent on cultural context than other forms of comedy. A cross-cultural appeal with universal themes, which transcend cultural boundaries, is a hallmark of successful situation comedy, and may explain the success of both American and British exports. (Citizendium 2012) According to Taflinger (1996), situation comedy has been the most popular form of program on American television since the 1940s.

Situation comedy originated in the United States in the 1920s and the first offering of the new genre was the radio program Amos 'n' Andy. After that the genre transitioned successfully to television, with such shows as 1940s Fibber McGee and Molly, and the iconic 1950s offering, I Love Lucy. (Citizendium 2012) Ever since a new genre of entertainment programming was born and became known as the situation comedy or 'sitcom'. Up until 1955, the sitcoms began to increase in the number of new shows

being produced and aired. In the beginning of the 1960's, sitcoms broke the mold of the traditional family setting and created shows that went against the grain of the 1950's television, such as *McHale's Navy* that was about World War II regiment in the South Pacific. (Taflinger 1996) At the end of the 1970's, sitcom audiences were in for groundbreaking story lines, and it became contemporary to eliminate the perfect family, which ignored important issues, such as racial equality and sexuality, from the sitcoms. In the 1980's, situation comedy jumped in the ratings with shows, such as *The Cosby Show*, and in 1989 *The Simpsons* aired. The 1990's ushered in the thought of "pushing the envelope" on sitcom boundaries. *Seinfeld* depicted a show about nothing and *Ellen* caused controversy in an episode, where the main character revealed that she was gay. With the controversial shows of the 1990's and 2000s, such as *Sex and the City*, there were also sitcoms, such as *Friends*, that followed the 'norm' of previous decades, but still kept up with the current trends of the decade. (Head 1998: 241). According to American television ratings the most popular sitcoms of the 1990's were *Friends*, *Frasier*, and *Everybody Loves Raymond* (Sitcoms Online 2005). America's most watched sitcoms of the 2013 to 2014 are *The Big Bang Theory*, *Modern Family*, *Two and a Half Men*, and *How I met Your Mother*. In 2013-2014 *How I Met Your Mother* reached 11.3 billion viewers. (Schneider 2014)

Sitcoms have evolved in response to lifestyle trends and they have changed drastically since the early shows to shows containing more controversial subject matters, but even nowadays situation comedies tend to have the same basic formula. They show a problem solved and a lesson learned in a half-hour, usually with a strong foundation of laughable humor. This definition by Head (1998: 241) perfectly sums up the storyline of the situation comedy *How I Met Your Mother* as well. According to Mitz (1980: 3), the predictability of the sitcom is the basis for its humor. Next week the characters are back to where they were the week before, only faced with a different, traditionally comical situation. The audience knows the characters will always react and respond to situations the way they are expected to.

There are three different forms of situation comedy, which I will discuss in the next subchapter, but the one thing they have in common is that they make people laugh. Mitz

(1980: 3–4) describes sitcoms as, “a small hunk of life exaggerated for comic purposes. If you play it realistically, it comes out drama, because very little in life itself is funny. People want a mirror held up to life, but at an angle so that it’s humorous”.

2.4.1. Types of Situation Comedy and Characters

Taflinger (1996) divides situation comedy into three distinct types: *action comedy* (actcom), *domestic comedy* (domcom), and *dramatic comedy* (dramedy). Action comedy is the most popular type of situation comedy on television, representing 88 percent of sitcoms. Actcom can be based on different themes: the family, places, gimmicks or occupation. The problems, complications, and solutions of actcom are based on verbal and physical action, and through these actions the humor of action comedy is created. *How I Met Your Mother* is a typical representative of action comedy. It focuses on a tight group of friends, who are like a family to each other, and around one specific place: New York. In addition, the humor of the series is based on verbal and physical action, which according to Taflinger (1996) is a distinct feature of action comedy.

Domestic comedy is more expansive than action comedy since it involves more people and has a greater sense of seriousness. In domcom the emphasis is on the characters and their growth and development as human beings. It is usually set around a family unit: a mother and/or father, and children. The problems that characters encounter in domestic comedy are more serious and related to human nature than those in an action comedy. The problems and solutions in domcom are mental or emotional, and the resolutions are a learning experience for all characters involved. A concept of family unity is an important theme in domestic comedy. A typical domestic comedy is for example the 1980’s *The Cosby Show*. (Taflinger 1996) Although, the characters of *How I Met Your Mother* are like a close family unit and the series follows Ted’s growth from a carefree young adult to a responsible father, the show is not serious enough to be categorized as domestic comedy.

The last type of situation comedy is dramatic comedy. According to Taflinger (1996), it is the most rare and most serious type of sitcom, representing slightly more than one

percent of all sitcoms. Dramedy is often very funny, but it is just as often very serious. Its emphasis is on thought and it often presents themes that are not humorous, such as war, death, crime, aging, unemployment, racism, and sexism. The humor in dramedy is usually comic intensification of certain themes. Dramedy often shows the regular characters in conflict with a certain theme. A typical representative of dramedy is the 1970's *All in the Family*. Taflinger (1996) further divides dramedy into two subcategories: human dramedy and advocate dramedy. In human dramedy, the themes are personified, showing the regular characters in conflict with the themes. In advocate dramedy, often two factions are represented, either with two characters in direct conflict with each other, each representing a point of view on the theme, or characters in conflict with the intangible by observing the effects of it on others and attempting to aid them. *How I Met Your Mother* differs greatly from dramatic comedy since the series never deals with themes that are as serious or emotionally charged as, for instance, war and death.

According to Taflinger (1996), there are three types of characters in situation comedies: main characters, supporting characters and transient characters. The majority of the action in a situation comedy is carried out by the main characters. Typically there is only one main character, but in *How I Met Your Mother* there are five main characters: Ted, Marshall, Lily, Barney, and Robin. Supporting characters are members of the regular cast. Taflinger (1996) continues that there is usually an extensive use of transients in sitcoms. Transient characters come in three varieties: the guest star, the small but necessary role, and the necessary but not constantly needed role. The guest star has a role in a single episode and usually provides a plot problem. There have been several real-life stars in *How I Met Your Mother* as guest stars, such as Katy Perry, Britney Spears, Enrique Iglesias, Kim Kardashian, and Jennifer Lopez. Taflinger (1996) clarifies that small but necessary roles are usually walk-on characters: delivery people, store clerks, and customers. They are necessary for the continuity of the plot by acting as agents for plot problems and complications, but they usually contribute little or nothing of themselves as characters. The third type of transient, the necessary but not constantly needed role, is a supporting role that does not appear in every episode. Often they will appear only two or three times during a season, although occasionally their

function is expanded. Transient characters provide plot problems and complications, or provide purely mechanical functions of a story, such as delivering packages or notes, revealing complications, etc. In *How I Met Your Mother* there are many characters that are not constantly needed but are important for the plot. The most prominent example of transient character is Ted's future wife and mother of his children, Tracy. She appeared in eight seasons only as an unseen character, but later her role was expanded and she appeared in fourteen episodes of the last and ninth season. Taflinger (1996) states that usually most of the characters in a situation comedy are sympathetic. The audience can identify with them and their problems and care whether or not they can solve the problems. However, often there is at least one character that is unsympathetic: the villain. A sympathetic side of the character is occasionally shown, particularly if the character is a continuing role in the show. In *How I Met Your Mother* the villain is one of the main characters, Barney Stinson. He is portrayed as a wild womanizer but an occurrence in the last season forces him to change his ways for good. The following chapter focuses on translation and discusses different types of audiovisual translation. In addition, subtitling and its restrictions are discussed in more detail.

3. AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

Audiovisual translation is a relatively young field of translation, but in today's multimedia society, audiovisual translation has gained great visibility and relevance as a means of fostering communication and dialogue in an increasingly multicultural and multilingual environment. Audiovisual translation is an umbrella term used to refer to the translation of programs in which the verbal dimension is only one of the many dimensions shaping the process of communication. The simultaneity of different semiotic layers through the visual channel of images, written text and gestures, and through the audio channel of music, noise and dialogue, make the translator's task particularly challenging in this field. (Diaz Cintas 2010: 344) In Finland the most prominent type of audiovisual translation is subtitling, and since that is the medium of translation in this study as well, the focus of this chapter will be on subtitling. However, other forms of audiovisual translation will be discussed briefly as well. The following subchapters introduce the different types of audiovisual translation, and discuss the nature and restrictions of subtitling in more detail.

3.1. Types of Audiovisual Translation

There are various types of audiovisual translation and Yves Gambier (2003: 172–173) categorizes them into two main groups of dominant and challenging audiovisual translation. The group of *dominant audiovisual translation* consists of eight types of audiovisual translation. The first dominant type of audiovisual translation is *interlingual subtitling* which involves moving from the oral dialogue to one or two written lines, and from one language to another, or sometimes to two languages, as in bilingual Finland. Interlingual subtitling can be offered to any audience, including the deaf and hard of hearing. According to Gambier (2003: 172), the second dominant type of audiovisual translation is *dubbing* which involves adapting a text for on-camera characters. It is limited mainly to film translation and it should not be reduced to lip-synchronization for when the face or the chest of the speaker is visible in a medium shot. Dubbing may only be time synchronized and in many cases the talking faces are being shot at a certain distance or in profile, as in animation films and children's comics. Gambier (2003: 173)

explains that in some countries lip synchrony is more important than in others, for example Americans are thought to require a higher degree of lip synchrony, as well as gesture and facial expression synchrony.

The above types of dominant audiovisual translation are the two most common ones in Finland. The third dominant type of audiovisual translation, according to Gambier (2003: 173), is *consecutive interpreting*, and it can be done in three possible modes: live on the radio when someone is interviewed, pre-recorded, and link up, for long-distance communication. The fourth dominant type of audiovisual translation is *simultaneous interpreting* which is used, for instance, during a debate in a studio. The fifth dominant type of audiovisual translation is *voice over*. It occurs when a documentary or an interview is translated and broadcasted approximately in synchrony by a journalist or an actor. The sixth dominant type of audiovisual translation is *simultaneous interpreting* where the original voice is either entirely reduced or turned down to a low level of audibility after a few seconds. The seventh dominant type of audiovisual translation is *voice over* in which the target voice is superimposed on top of the source voice. The eighth and last dominant type of audiovisual translation according to Gambier (2003: 174), is *free commentary*, which is an adaptation for a new audience, with additions, omissions, clarifications and comments. Synchronization is done with on-screen images rather than with soundtrack. The mode is used for children's programs, documentaries and corporate videos.

According to Gambier (2003: 174–176), the group of *challenging audiovisual translation* consists of five types of audiovisual translation. The first type of challenging audiovisual translation is translating scenario/script. *Scenario/script translation* is mainly needed in order to get subsidies, grants and other financial support for a co-production. The second type of challenging audiovisual translation is *intralingual subtitling* which is done for the benefit of the deaf and hard of hearing, or sometimes to help migrants to learn or to improve their command of their new language. The third type of challenging audiovisual translation is *live subtitling* which is used in various types of interviews. Live subtitling is done live, and thus it differs from live subtitles which are prepared in advance but inserted by the subtitler during transmission of the

TV program. The fourth type of challenging audiovisual translation is *surtitling* which is one line subtitling placed above a theatre stage or in the back of the seats. It has become common in a certain number of theatres and opera houses. The fifth and last type of challenging audiovisual translation according to Gambier (2003: 176) is *audio description* that can be described as double dubbing in interlingual transfer for the blind and visually impaired. It involves the reading of information describing what is happening on the screen. The information is added to the soundtrack of the dubbing of the dialogue, with no interference from the sound and music effects.

In Gambier's (2003: 178) opinion all these modes of translation have blurred the traditional borders between translation and interpreting, and between written and oral codes. For instance, subtitling is a kind of written simultaneous interpreting because both are constrained by temporal factors of reading time and speech delivery, and both are conditioned by a considerable density of information, such as density effected by pictures, sound and language, and density in the form of specialized knowledge and data. In addition, both modes are caught between the written and the oral codes since the subtitler must write, what is conveyed orally, within a limited space and the interpreter conveys through the oral mode a text that may be written and read. Finally both have to be conscious of special issues of reception: the audience is surprised when the interpreter is silent while the speaker continues to talk, and similarly, viewers may feel uncomfortable if subtitles do not appear while characters are still talking on the screen. (Gambier 2003: 178) The following subchapter focuses on one of the types of dominant audiovisual translation, subtitling, in more detail.

3.2. Subtitling

In Finland, the most prominent type of audiovisual translation is subtitling. According to Holopainen (2015: 78–87), subtitles are used in various forms of communication and for multiple purposes because technically they are much simpler and cheaper to execute, when compared to, for example, dubbing which is a highly expensive form of audiovisual translation. In addition, dubbing suits Finnish language poorly because it is a challenge to achieve good lip synchrony if the source language and the target language

are very different. In Finland, subtitles are mainly used in television, on DVD's, in cinema and in computer- and console games. According to Holopainen (2015: 87), on average, a Finnish viewer reads 30 novels worth of subtitles every year. Therefore, the impact of subtitles on language proficiency is notable and thus, subtitles and the language used in them should have strict quality requirements.

Jorge Diaz Cintas (2010: 344) explains that subtitles consist of one or two lines of text and they are displayed horizontally usually at the bottom of the screen and they appear in synchrony with the image and the dialogue. The synchronization process is known as spotting or timing and it may be carried out by the translators themselves or by technicians who know the subtitling program. The time a subtitle stays on screen depends both on the speed at which the original exchange is delivered and on the viewer's assumed reading speed. According to Diaz Cintas (2010: 344) the best practice should be based on the so called '6 second rule', whereby two full lines of around 35 characters each can be comfortably read in six seconds. Diaz Cintas (2010: 344) also thinks that with the advent of DVD and mobile technology and the proliferation of audiovisual programs, today's viewers are faster audiovisual readers than those of previous generations.

Whilst respecting the technical specification discussed above, according to Diaz Cintas (2010: 345), subtitles must provide a semantically adequate account of the source language dialogue. Viewers do not normally have the possibility of back tracking to retrieve information, and that has a great impact in the way subtitles are presented on screen. Ideally, if subtitles are to be easily understood in the short time available, each subtitle should be semantically self-contained and come across as a coherent, logical and syntactical unit. To enhance readability, both spotting and line-breaking should be carried out in such a way that words that are intimately connected by logic, semantics or grammar should be written on the same line or subtitle whenever possible. Diaz Cintas (2010: 346) continues that the main strategy used by subtitlers is reduction. Reduction is partial, when the original dialog is condensed, and total, when a part of the message is deleted completely. In both cases, the translator has to make sure that vital information is not deleted. Subtitles cannot translate everything that is said but they must strive to

capture the essence of what is said. Verbal humor is an essential part of *How I Met Your Mother* and therefore it should be respected in the subtitling. Reduction of the original dialog is evident, as Diaz Cintas (2010: 346) pointed out, but verbal humor should not be deleted completely from the dialog.

According to De Linde and Kay (1999: 9), the term 'subtitle' derives from the term for a subordinate or additional title of a literary work. The term was initially used for text or intertitles of silent movies, which were cut into the film as a narrative aid. As a result, both the deaf and the hearing had the same access to films. As was mentioned in the introduction, nowadays subtitles are used widely in different European countries, such as, Greece, Holland, Portugal, Belgium, and in the Northern countries. De Linde (1999: 1) clarifies that there are two distinct types of subtitling. *Intralingual subtitling* is for deaf and hard of hearing people and *interlingual subtitling* is for foreign language films. The distinction between them comes from the different requirements by deaf and hearing viewers. The soundtrack of a film or a TV program carries two sources of information: linguistic information from the content and phonetics of a dialogue, and non-speech information, such as sounds, that also contribute to the overall meaning of a program. Interlingual subtitles transfer the meaning of the dialog while relying on the remainder of the soundtrack to carry the full meaning of the sequence. Whereas intralingual subtitles are for deaf viewers and thus the non-speech elements of the soundtrack have to be transferred as well.

De Linde (1999: 1) further continues that although interlingual and intralingual subtitles have differences, the both types have strong common elements as well. Both of them take place in the same audio-visual context, both involve a conversation of spoken dialogue into written text and in both forms the amount of dialogue has to be reduced to meet the technical conditions of the medium and the reading capacities of viewers. In addition, in both forms of subtitling, language is transferred between distinct linguistic systems and between two separate languages or between different modes of a single language, while functioning independently with another visual and semiotic system.

In De Linde's (1999: 3–4) opinion, interlingual subtitling differs from text translation in a number of ways: there are additional visual and audio components, including an oral

soundtrack, there is a switch from oral to written language and finally there are obligatory omissions in the source dialogue. In interlingual subtitling only the linguistic element of an audio-visual text is transferred but in its altered form it still has to relate and equate the source dialog. The following subchapter discusses restriction and challenges of subtitling.

3.3. Restrictions and Challenges of Subtitling

Subtitling as a mode of translation contains various restriction and thus challenges the translator. According to De Linde and Kay (1999: 5–7), the main conditions of subtitling stem from the integration of text, sound and image, the reading capabilities of target viewers and the restrictions that these two factors place on space and time. Reading speeds and screen space differ between cinema and television but, in general, subtitles are a maximum of two lines. The restriction on time derives from the need for synchronicity and the reading speeds of viewers. Average reading speed for a hearing viewer is around 150 to 180 words per minute. Reading speed varies according to the quantity and complexity of linguistic information in the subtitles. Reading speed is also affected by the subject matter of a program or film – if the story is exiting the viewer’s reading speed is enhanced. A film or TV program is a combination of visual images and an audio soundtrack including dialogue. The transformation of the dialogue into written subtitles has to be carried out with respect to the relations between all these components. In addition to spatial balance between subtitle and image, there has to be a precise synchronization of image and subtitle as well. This is a procedure that requires perfect timing from the translator as both systems are semiotically related. According to De Linde (1999: 7) this relationship is best illustrated in comic situations. *How I Met Your Mother* contains plenty of verbal humor where linguistic expression must coordinate with the visual image, and thus translating the series can be a challenge for the translator.

De Linde (1999: 4) continues that a further feature related to the transfer of meaning between speech and written language is the challenge concerning accuracy. There has to be a balance between the clarity of a particular utterance and its stylistic function. For

example, there might be elements of speech that at first appear to be irrelevant and therefore omittable when converted into written form, but these elements may turn out to be integral to a character's style of speech. Diaz Cintas (2010: 346) agrees that the transition from oral to written poses challenges and therefore raises the question of whether non-standard speech, like accents and very colloquial trait, can be effectively rendered in writing. Often this type of linguistic variation is neutralized in the subtitles, but De Linde (1999: 13) continues that if accents and foreign languages contribute to the story, they have to be represented in the subtitles as well, but these features have to be transferred in a way that does not reduce the viewer's reading speed. Swearwords and other taboo expressions are usually deleted from the subtitles, as there is the belief that they are more offensive when reproduced in text than when verbalized (Diaz Zintas 2010: 346). According to De Linde (1999: 4), the transfer of language mode imposes a complex choice on the subtitler, who's aim is to respect the features of both spoken and written modes of language. Some amount of omission in the dialog is inevitable because fast spoken words can rarely be transcribed into two lines of written text. Thus, the dialogue has to be condensed, which means selecting particular features of the source text to be omitted, either by straight deletion or reductive paraphrasing. Diaz Zintas (2010: 346) concludes that because of the concurrent presence of the original soundtrack and the subtitles, and especially, when translating from a well-known language like English, subtitling is particularly vulnerable and open to the scrutiny of anyone with knowledge of the source text. One strategy used to deal with this is to follow the syntactic structure of the source text as far as possible so as to reinforce the synchronization and to preserve the same chronology of events as in the original utterances.

This chapter has discussed the different types of audiovisual translation and restrictions and challenges of subtitling. Verbal humor creates prominent challenges for a translator because it is often based on cultural and linguistic issues and therefore does not transfer easily between source text and target text. The aim of this study is to investigate which translation strategies the translator has used in order to transfer the verbal humor from the dialog to the subtitles, how much of the verbal humor of the source text can be retained in the target text, and how much creativity is used in the translation process.

The following chapter focuses on translation of humor and presents the translation strategies of retention and re-creation by James S. Holmes (1988).

4. TRANSLATION OF HUMOR

Humor and translation is an area that has attracted a great deal of attention, especially the issue of its translatability and untranslatability. According to Chiaro (2011: 366), various scholars have written about the impossibility of translating humorous discourse, and the popular opinion is that humor does not travel because it is culture-specific and people would appear to laugh primarily at what is familiar. Yet despite the impossibility of translating humor, it is indeed translated. Humor occurring in literature, theatre, opera and art house cinema, along with globalized television products, such as advertisements, and situation comedies have been regularly translated. In a process of transferring humor from the source text to the target text the loss of humor can often be immeasurable. All translation is problematic and all translated products seem to be inferior with regards to the original source, but it appears that translated humor suffers more than most. (Chiaro 2011: 366)

Any instance of verbally expressed humor, be it wordplay or allusion which are the most significant types of humor in *How I Met Your Mother*, will involve the need for successful communication. Thus, if instances of wordplay are to be translated, the necessity for communicative success is doubled, as the text in question involves linguistic-cultural constraints. (Chiaro 2011: 365-366) No matter how well translators know the target language, cultural references and polysemous items may involve them in long explanations that will certainly reduce the humorous effect of the translation (Chiaro 1992: 77). Language and culture seem to be indivisible and, without shared sociocultural knowledge between a sender and a recipient, a common linguistic code will not help. When a comic situation is too culture-specific it will not be seen as amusing outside its culture of origin; if humor is to be successful, it has to play on knowledge that is shared between the sender and the recipient. The recipient of the humor must understand the code on which it is delivered, and also possess a large amount of sociocultural information. (Chiaro 1992: 10)

This chapter focuses on translation of humor and the translation strategies applied for the analysis of this study. The following subchapter discusses briefly the issue of translatability of humor and the second subchapter introduces the translation strategies

of retention and re-creation by James S. Holmes (1988) illustrated with examples from my material.

4.1. Translatability of Humor

According to Chiaro (2011: 367-370), all languages are different and that is why formal equivalence between a source text and a target text is almost impossible to achieve. Humor makes translational matters even worse, firstly because humorous discourse is constructed through extreme exploitations of the linguistic options available in a given language, and the likelihood that different languages will be able to make use of exactly the same options for humorous purposes is unlikely. Secondly, humorous discourse relies on implicit encyclopedic knowledge that must be shared between the addresser and the addressee. Misunderstandings are evident when the two languages in question are totally different languages.

As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, Chiaro is one of the scholars who are of the opinion that humor and translation form an almost impossible match. According to Schröter (2005: 100) those who are of this opinion base their claims on too narrow an understanding of what translation is. They see translation namely as a very close transfer of source-text elements into the target text, with minimal changes in meaning, function and form. If such a view is accepted, then humor is indeed in most cases virtually untranslatable. Delabastita (1996: 133–134), however, is one of the scholars who does not agree with the often held view that translation of humor is impossible. He argues the opposite opinion via translation of wordplay. According to Delabastita (1996:133), significant wordplay in the original text has to be preserved rather than eliminated, but the problem is that often it seems to defy any attempt to that effect. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that translating wordplay is not impossible and justifies his claim with a wide range of translation strategies that are at the translator's disposal. These translation strategies are similar to the ones I'm utilizing in the analysis of my material by James S. Holmes (1988: 47–48).

According to Delabastita (1996: 133–134), the most important translation strategies, when translating wordplay, are: 1.) a source text pun is translated by a target-language

pun (similar with Holmes' (1988: 47–48) retentive translation strategy), 2.) the pun is rendered by a non-punning phrase (similar with the loss of humor strategy used in this thesis), 3.) the pun is replaced by some wordplay-related rhetorical device, such as, repetition, alliteration, rhyme, etc. which aims to recapture the same effect (similar with re-creative strategy by Holmes (1988: 47–48)), and 4.) the portion of text containing the pun is omitted (similar with the omission of humor strategy used in this thesis).

Delabastita (1996: 134) continues that when translators claim that verbal humor is untranslatable, they mean that none of the abovementioned solutions meet their requirements of translation equivalence. According to him, many critics are unwilling to consider omission or addition of wordplay as possible, let alone legitimate translation techniques. Many translators will already be troubled by the fact that transferring a pun from the source text to the target text involves noticeable translation shifts and such shifts may affect the pun's formal structure, its linguistic composition, or its meaning and content. Sometimes even the immediate textual environment of the pun has to be altered when a new contextual setting has to be created for the target text wordplay to come to life.

According to Delabastita (1996: 135–136), the only way to be faithful to the original text is to be unfaithful to it. Source oriented translators are in effect forced to lift the requirement of fidelity and leave the matter to be decided by pragmatic consideration. Time pressure plays an important part in this since time is usually at a premium for translators, and therefore they will often go for the first more or less acceptable solution that crosses their mind. In addition, personal taste and a willingness to accommodate target audience expectations play role in the reproduction of the source text.

Leppihalme (1996: 212–213) also reflects the translation of verbal humor, especially the translation of wordplay and allusions. According to her, wordplay and allusive puns are much less common in Finnish than in English, and this is mainly because Finnish words do not move easily from one word class to another, as in English. This affects greatly the translatability of these two types of humor. In addition, it is undeniable that translated allusions are harder for readers to cope with than native-language allusions, and it would seem that some allusive wordplay in translation can hardly be enjoyed by

other than bilingual and bicultural readers who are able to back-translate if need be while reading the target text. Leppihalme (1996: 214) continues that it would appear that the problem of translating humor is not so much a linguistic as a cultural problem. A translator who aims at a coherent target text may sometimes have to accept that, as far as the general target audience is concerned, an instance of verbal humor will not work without complete rewriting. The better the translator can visualize the potential readers of the target text, the easier it will be to make reliable assumptions about the background knowledge they might possess and to choose a translation method in an individual case. On occasions, omissions will no doubt be a legitimate strategy. (Leppihalme 1996: 214)

This subchapter has discussed the translatability of humor. The transfer of verbal humor, such as wordplay and allusions that are the main types of humor found from my material, is proven to be challenging but not impossible. The following subchapter introduces the translation strategies utilized in the analysis of this study: retention and re-creation by James S. Holmes (1988).

4.2. Retention and Re-creation of Humor

A translation strategy utilized in this study originates from James S. Holmes (1988: 44-49), a translator and a poet, who developed a model of retention and recreation originally to facilitate the process of translating poetry. Like the translatability of humor, question of whether poetry is translatable is a debate that has been argued long and furiously as well. At one extreme of the debate are those who consider that every text can be transferred from one language to another without substantial loss. At the opposite extreme are those who consider that a text in one language is never completely equivalent to a text in another language. Most translators take their stance in between these two extremes. According to Holmes (1988: 47), translators are faced with problems that can be grouped into three planes or levels, reflective of the three backgrounds against which the original text manifests itself. Firstly, a text is set in a linguistic context in order to communicate something, the writer draws upon a part of the expressive means of the specific language he is using, and the words of the text take

on significance for the reader only when interpreted within that context. Secondly, a text is set in a literary intertext meaning that the text is written in interaction with a whole body of texts existing within a given literary tradition, and even its imagery and themes are linked with those other texts. Finally, the text exists within a socio-cultural situation, in which objects, symbols, and abstract concepts function in a way that is never the same in any other culture or society.

Holmes (1988: 47-48) further argues that the basic problem for the translator is that he/she must somehow shift the original text not only to another linguistic context but also to another literary intertext and socio-cultural situation. On each of these three planes, the choices of the translator range primarily on the axis of *exoticizing* versus *naturalizing*. The translator has to decide if a specific element of the original linguistic context, literary intertext or a socio-cultural situation, should be retained knowing that in the translation that element will acquire an exotic aspect not attached to it in its native habitat, or should the element be replaced by an equivalent in the target context, intertext or situation. Choices of this kind may be complicated by choices on another axis of historicizing versus modernizing. On this axis, the translator should decide whether or not to reflect the time of the original poem in the translation, selecting comparable historical solutions on the linguistic, literary, and socio-cultural planes. Each translator works consciously or unconsciously on each of the three planes and on the *x* axis of *exoticizing* versus *naturalizing* and on the *y* axis of *historicizing* versus *modernizing*. Usually translators move on all of these axes and, thus, pure culture translations are rarely, if ever, made. When a translation is exoticizing and historicizing, it is considered as *retention*, in other words, retentive translation strategy stays close to the source text and reveals the foreign origin in the target text. When a translation is naturalizing and modernizing, it is considered as *re-creation*, in other words, re-creative strategy brings the translation closer to the target culture and thus allows the translator to be more creative in the translation process. According to Holmes (1988: 48), the translator has to choose between retentive and re-creative translation strategies in order to produce an acceptable translation. Figure below shows Holmes' diagram of retention and re-creation:

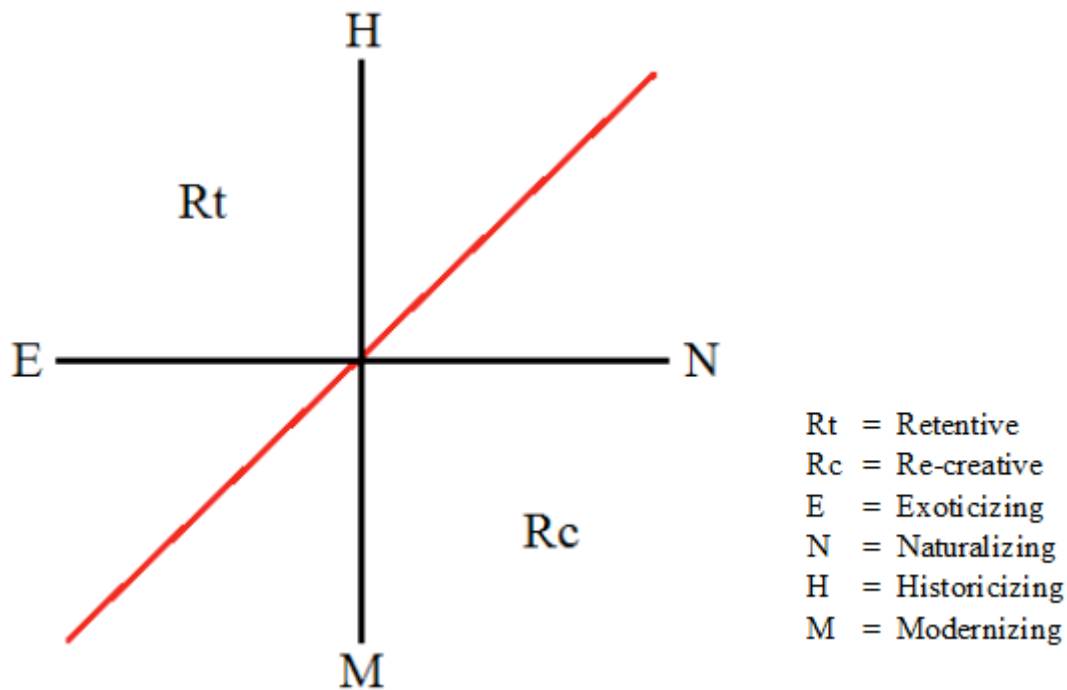


Figure 1. Retention & re-creation (Holmes 1988: 49)

When Holmes (1988: 49-51) studied poems, he noted that among contemporary translators, there was a marked tendency towards *modernization* and *naturalization*, which is the re-creative translation strategy, of the linguistic context the source was set in, and a similar tendency in the same direction in regard to the literary intertext. He also noted an opposing tendency towards *historicizing* and *exoticizing*, which is the retentive translation strategy, in the socio cultural situation the source text existed in. In reality, even the translators who favor extreme retention or extreme re-creation are not clear-cut in their individual choices. This indicates that the goal of the translator is something other than retention or re-creation as such. According to Holmes (1988: 50), the two basic goals of the translation are to execute the criterion of minimum matching or minimum fit and the poetic criterion. The criterion of minimum matching or minimum fit means that the final result must match the original text to a large enough degree in order for it to be considered a translation. The poetic criterion refers to the target text being the same text type as the original text and it entails a demand of unity or homogeneity, which means that the target text needs to be a coherent textual whole. The nature of translation entails a basic dichotomy between source and target languages,

literatures, and cultures. In order to harmonize the demand of unity and the fact of dichotomy, the translator must map out a general strategy of selecting between retentive and re-creative possibilities in order to create an illusion of unity. The translator is required to make several choices in the pursuit of unity, and that is why, the translator only presents one possible interpretation of the original text.

The transfer of verbal humor is the focus of this study. I study how the verbal humor has been translated in the subtitles of the situation comedy *How I Met Your Mother* and whether the translator has managed to preserve the same type of humor as in the original dialog or whether another type of humor has been used instead. In this study, translation strategy is considered as retention, if the same type of humor is found in the source text and the target text. For a translation strategy to be seen as re-creation, the humor of the target text has to use a different type of humor than the source text, in other words, the translator has been creative with the translation. In addition to retention and re-creation, the translation strategies in this study also include loss of humor and omission of humor since some humor might be impossible to transfer to the subtitles. What follows are the examples of these four translation strategies found from my material. Source text (ST) is presented first, followed by the Finnish subtitles (SUB). In addition, a back translation into English from the Finnish subtitle is provided. Each example is marked with season and episode number. Season has been shortened as S and episode as E.

The following example shows a retentive translation strategy in use. Ted is celebrating his 28th birthday and in this scene, Lily is teasing him about still being single.

(10) S1E21 ST:

Lily: Still, you know, another year older. Still single. You don't hear your **Tedological clock** ticking?

Ted: Nope. I hit the snooze button.

SUB:

Lily: Vuoden vanhempi, mutta yhä sinkku. Eikö **tedologinen kellosi** tikitä?

[Another year older, but still single. Doesn't your tedological clock tick?]

Ted: Painoin "torkku" –nappia.

[I pressed the snooze button.]

The wordplay of this scene arises when Lily asks whether Ted's biological clock is already ticking, but she uses a nonce word *Tedological clock* instead. Tedological clock is an invented word formed out of Ted's name and biological clock. The translator has translated the nonce word *tedological clock* as *tedologinen kello*. Thus, the nonce word of the source text has been retained in the subtitles and therefore, the translation strategy is categorized as retention of humor.

The next example illustrates a re-creative translation strategy in use. In this episode, Barney has promised to teach Ted how to successfully flirt with girls at the local pub, but Ted has drunk too much and Marshall and Lily decide to take him home and put him to bed. In this scene, he has gotten up and returned back to the pub. Barney is glad Ted came back, because now he can continue mentoring Ted.

(11) S1E9 ST

Barney: Do you know what time it is? **It's do a clock**. Bring it!

SUB:

Barney: Tiedätkö mitä kello on? **Kello on puoli pano**.

[Do you know what time it is? It's half past lay.]

The wordplay of this scene is created with paronymy, that is play on words that have similar but not identical pronunciation and spelling. Barney looks at his watch, which is two a clock and says *it's do a clock*, referring to them continuing to hit on girls. The translator has replaced the paronymy with a different type of wordplay and thus, the translation strategy is categorized as re-creation of humor. The translator has been creative and translated the paronymy of the source text as *kello on puoli pano* thus turning it into polysemy, in this case a metaphor. This metaphor refers to them taking the girls home.

The following example presents a case of loss of humor. In this scene, Robin and Barney are at Lily's kindergarten telling about their careers to the kids. Robin talks about her career as reporter and the speech goes horribly wrong. Barney delivers a successful speech and teases Robin about her catastrophic performance.

(12) S1E18 ST:

Barney: So, Robin, you ever report on **train wrecks**? 'Cause I just saw one. What up? Tiny five.

SUB:

Barney: Oletko raportoinut **onnettomuuksista**? Tuo oli sellainen. Pikkuviitonen.

[Have you reported about accidents? That was one. Tiny five.]

The wordplay of this scene is created with polysemy which is play on word with several meanings. Barney uses polysemy to call Robin's speech a *train wreck* which means that the speech was a disaster. The translator has translated the *train wreck* as *onnettomuus*. The translator has not been able to retain the polysemy in the subtitles or re-create the instance with another type of humor, and therefore, the instance is no longer humorous. Thus, the translation of humor is categorized as loss of humor.

The final example presents an omission of humor. In this episode, Barney is criticizing Ted about not taking action in his life instead of just thinking about doing things. Barney promises to become his mentor and teach him how to live.

(13) S1E9 ST:

Barney: Ted, your problem is all you do is think, think, think. I'm teaching you how to **do, do, do!**

Marshall: **Doo-doo**, hah!

Barney: Totally.

SUB:

Barney: sinä vain ajattelet. Minä opettelen toimimaan.

[You just think. I learn how to do.]

Marshall: -----

Barney: -----

Wordplay in the form of homophony which is play on words with different meanings that have identical pronunciation but different spelling, arises when Marshall, who has passively listened to Barney's declaration, suddenly activates when he hears Barney's words *do,do*. He laughs and repeats them slowly thus, making them sound like feces; *doo-doo*. The translator has omitted Marshall's line completely from the subtitles and therefore, the translation is categorized as omission of humor.

In conclusion, retentive and re-creative translation strategies apply to successfully transferred humor and loss and omission of humor apply to untransferred humor. The following chapter contains the analysis of this study. In order to find out how much of the source text humor is transferred to the target text, the material of my study that is wordplay and allusions, are categorized utilizing the four translation strategies described above.

5. TRANSLATION OF HUMOR IN *HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER*

The aim of this thesis was to study the transfer of verbal humor from the original dialog to the Finnish subtitles. The material consisted of 42 episodes of the American situation comedy *How I Met Your Mother*. The focus of the study was to investigate which translation strategies the translator had used in order to transfer the verbal humor from the source text to the target text, how much of the verbal humor of the source text was preserved in the target text, and how much creativity was used in the translation process. The assumptive hypothesis of this study was that the retentive translation strategy would be more frequently used than the re-creative translation strategy in the translation of verbal humor in *How I Met Your Mother*. This was based on the arguments by Schröter (2005: 53) that subtitling as a form of audiovisual translation does not offer as much freedom for the translator to be creative than for example dubbing offers, because subtitling is less prone to censorship since the original soundtrack remains unaltered, and viewers who understand the source language have a possibility to examine the translation in terms of textual loyalty. As a result, the translator might prefer using retentive translation strategy instead of re-creative translation strategy when transferring verbal humor from the original dialog to the subtitles.

In order to analyze, how the verbal humor had been transferred from the source text into the target text, the most typical types of verbal humor found from *How I Met Your Mother* were identified. Two categories of humor arose as the most significant means of creating verbal humor in the series: wordplay and allusions. In order to investigate whether my hypothesis was correct, the translation strategies used by the translators of *How I Met Your Mother* were divided into categories of retention and re-creation, by Holmes (1988: 47–48), on the grounds of how the verbal humor was translated.). In addition to retention and re-creation of humor, also loss of humor and omission of humor were included in the translation strategies of this study, because some humor was bound to be impossible to transfer from the source text to the subtitles. The following chapter presents the main findings of this study.

5.1. Main Findings

Humor is a central theme of *How I Met Your Mother*, and therefore humor should have a central role in the translation as well. The translators transferred the humor of the source text to the target text either by using the retentive translation strategy or the re-creative translation strategy. The most typical type of verbal humor in the series was wordplay in the form of polysemy, homonymy, homophony, paronymy and nonce words. The second largest type of humor was allusions in the form of pure allusion and allusive puns. The pie chart below (figure 2.) illustrates the shares of verbal humor in the source text of *How I Met Your Mother*.

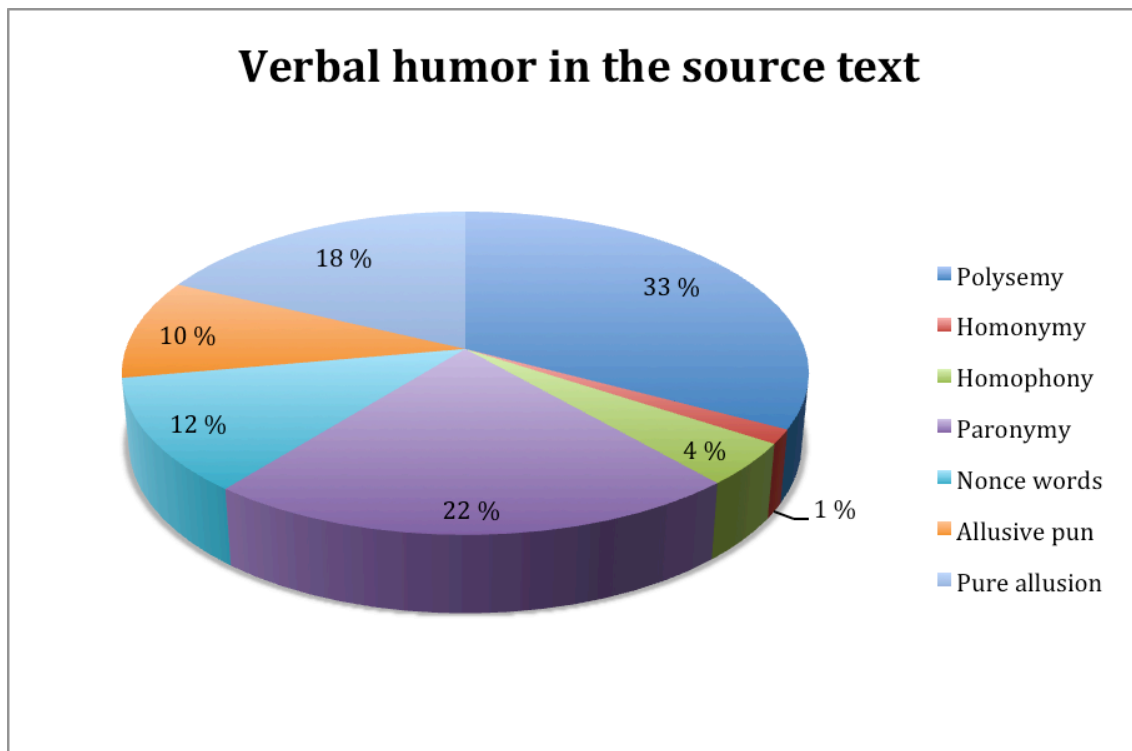


Figure 2. Verbal humor in the source text of *How I Met Your Mother*

The source text consisted of a total of 140 instances of verbal humor. Wordplay turned out to be the most significant type of humor with 101 instances, representing 72% of the verbal humor in the source text. Wordplay was further divided into 5 subcategories. The largest category of wordplay was polysemy with 46 instances thus representing 33% of the source text humor. The second largest category of wordplay was paronymy with 31

instances, representing 22% of the source text humor. The third largest category of wordplay was nonce words with 16 instances, representing 12% of the verbal humor. The two smallest categories of wordplay were homophony with 6 instances, representing 4% of the source text humor and finally homonymy with 2 instances, representing only 1% of the verbal humor in the source text. The second largest type of humor in *How I Met Your Mother* turned out to be allusions with 39 instances, representing 28% of the source text humor. Allusions were further divided into two subcategories of pure allusions and allusive puns. Pure allusions were the larger category with 25 instances, representing 18% of the source text humor, and allusive puns came second with 14 instances thus representing 10% of the verbal humor in the source text.

The Finnish subtitles of *How I Met Your Mother* consisted of 52 instances of verbal humor. Although the translators were able to preserve only 37% of the original verbal humor, they clearly had recognized the importance of wordplay as a means of creating humor in the series, since it was the dominant type of verbal humor in the target text as well. There were 42 instances of wordplay in the subtitles that represents immense 81% of the verbal humor in the target text. Thus the target text had a higher percentage of wordplay than the source text. The pie chart (figure 3) on the following page illustrates the shares of verbal humor in the Finnish subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother*.

As in the source text, the largest category of humor in the target text was also polysemy with 26 instances, representing respectable 50% of the entire verbal humor in the subtitles. Thus, subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother* had a higher percentage of polysemy than the source text. The second largest category of wordplay in the subtitles was nonce words with 10 instances, representing 19% of the target text humor. Therefore, also the percentage of nonce words was higher in the subtitles than in the source text. The third largest type of verbal humor in the subtitles was pure allusions with 6 instances, representing 11% of the verbal humor in the subtitles. Hence, the share of pure allusions was nearly the same in both the source text and the target text. The fourth largest category was paronymy with 5 instances, representing 10% of the target text humor. The share of paronymy was therefore significantly smaller in the subtitles

than in the source text. The smallest categories of humor in the subtitling were allusive puns with 4 instances, representing 8% of the target text humor and homonymy with only 1 instance and 1% representation of verbal humor in the subtitles. Thus, the shares of these categories of humor were fairly equal in both the source text and the target text. Subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother* did not contain any instances of homophony whereas the target text contained 4% of homophony.

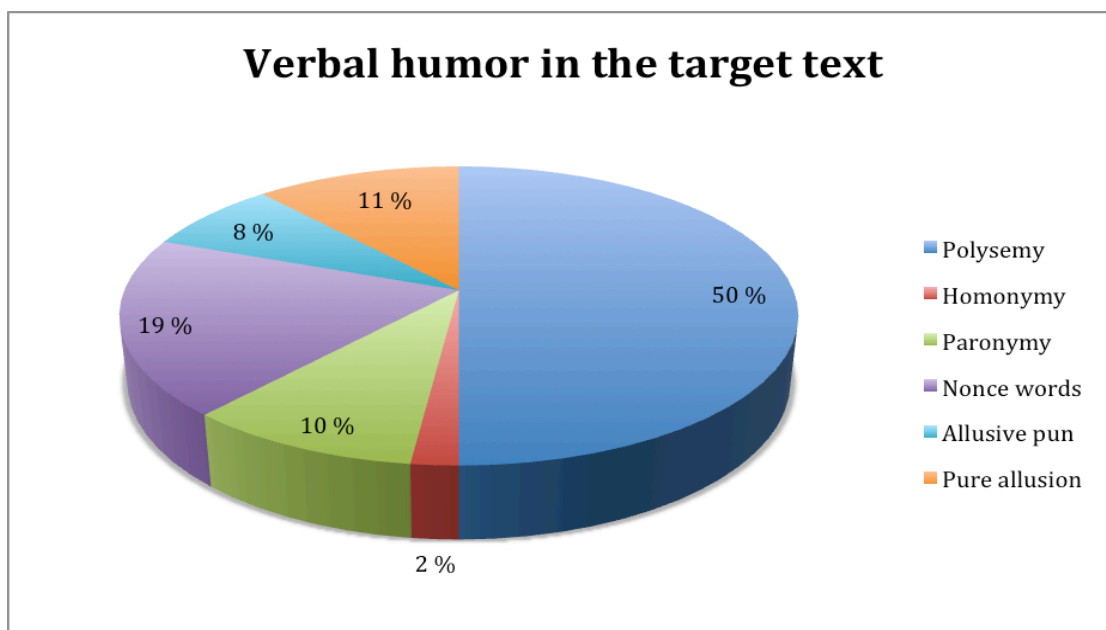


Figure 3. Verbal humor in the subtitled Finnish version of *How I Met Your Mother*

In conclusion, wordplay dominated both the source text and the target text, and polysemy was the largest category of wordplay in both. The source text had a notably larger share of paronymy than the target text, whereas target text had a larger share of nonce words than the source text. In addition, the source text contained a larger share of allusions than the target text. Homonymy was the smallest category in both the source text and the target text.

The translators of *How I Met Your Mother* were able to transfer 42% of the source text humor into the subtitles. The following pie chart (figure 4) illustrates the use of different translation strategies in the subtitling of the series.

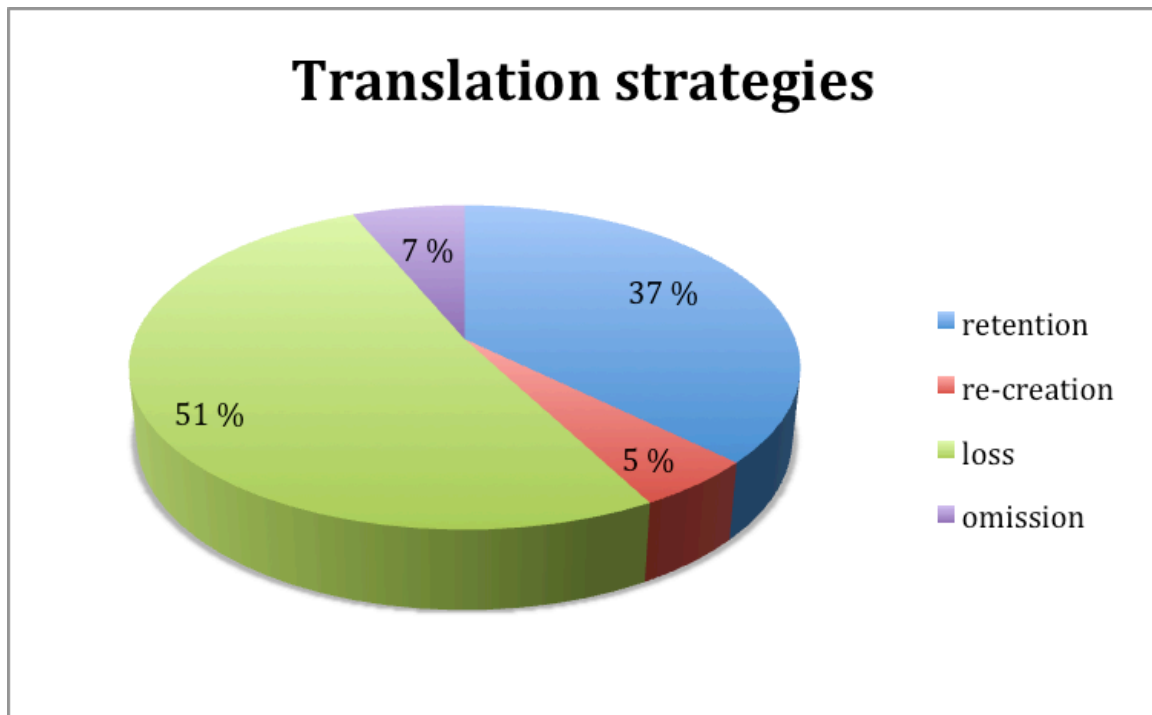


Figure 4. The use of translation strategies in the subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother*

Retention as a translation strategy clearly dominated the transfer of verbal humor over re-creation thus proving my hypothesis correct. Transferred humor, that is retained and re-created humor, consisted of 59 instances, out of which 52 were retained and 7 re-created. This means that in percentages 37% of the verbal humor in the series was transferred into the subtitles using the retentive translation strategy, and merely 5% of the verbal humor was transferred using the re-creative translation strategy. The translators were able to transfer under half of the source text humor into the subtitles of *How I Met Your Mother*. A total of 81 out of 140 instances of source text humor could not be successfully transferred into the subtitles. This means that in percentages as much as 58% of the source text humor remained untransferred, out of which 51% were loss of humor with 72 instances, and 7% were omission of humor with 9 instances. These results seem to support the common opinion that humor does not travel easily between two completely different languages.

The table (table 1) below illustrates detailed results on the overall use of translation strategies in the subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother*. Overall in the translation of

wordplay and allusions, loss of humor was surprisingly the largest category of the four translation strategies. This can probably be explained with vast structural differences between English and Finnish languages. Moreover, subtitling as a mode of audiovisual translation challenges the translators with restrictions of space and time.

Table 1. Translation strategies in subtitling *How I Met Your Mother*

Type/Translation Strategy	TRANSFERRED		UNTRANSFERRED		TOTAL
	retained	re-created	lost	omitted	
WORDPLAY	42	5	49	5	101
Polysemy	26	0	19	1	46
Homonymy	1	0	1	0	2
Homophony	0	2	2	2	6
Paronymy	5	3	22	1	31
Nonce words	10	0	5	1	16
ALLUSIONS	10	2	23	4	39
Allusive pun	4	0	10	0	14
Pure allusion	6	2	13	4	25
TOTAL	52	7	72	9	140

As can be seen from the table above, a total of 72 instances of verbal humor were lost in the translation of which 68% were wordplay and 32% were allusions. The substantial loss of wordplay and allusions is due to the fact that Finnish words do not move easily

from one word class to another, as in English, and thus they are not as common in Finnish (Leppihalme 1996: 212). Out of all the categories of humor, paronymy had the largest share of loss of humor with 22 lost instances, in percentages 71% of the source text paronymy was lost. This is probably due to linguistic differences since paronymy is play on words with similar pronunciation and spelling and it is much more rare in Finnish.

Retention of humor was the second most frequently used translation strategy in the subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother*. As was mentioned earlier polysemy was the largest category of verbal humor in the target text with 46 instances, out of which the translators were able to retain 57%. Thus, polysemy turned out to be the second most effortlessly transferring type of verbal humor. This is probably due to the fact that polysemy is common in both languages. None of the instances of homophony were retained in the subtitles and from the 31 instances of paronymy only 16% were retained. Whereas in the category of nonce words retention was the dominant translation strategy with 10 out of 16 instances retained, in percentage that is 63%. Thus, nonce words transferred from the source text to the subtitles more effortlessly than any other type of verbal humor in this study. This might be explained by the fact that nonce words are words created for a single occasion, and creating those words is equally common in both languages. In the transfer of allusions, allusive puns had a higher tendency to be retained than pure allusions, which is somewhat surprising since allusive puns challenge the translator with both linguistic and cultural material.

Omission was the second least favored translation strategy used in translating wordplay and allusions. Wordplay contained 5% of completely omitted verbal humor and allusion contained 10% of completely omitted humor. Homophony contained the largest share of omission of humor with 33%. This is not surprising since the translators were not able to retain a single instance of homophony. None of the allusive puns were omitted in the subtitles whereas 8% of the pure allusions were omitted. The least favored translation strategy in the transfer of verbal humor was re-creation. Wordplay contained only 5 instances of re-creation of humor. Two of these re-created instances were homophony

and 3 were instances were paronymy. In allusions none of the allusive puns were re-created whereas 8% of pure allusions were re-created.

In conclusion, most of the source text humor of *How I Met Your Mother* had been lost in the Finnish subtitles. This suggests that the successful transfer of humor between English and Finnish is almost impossible. Retention of humor as a translation strategy dominated over re-creation, and in fact re-creation was the least utilized translation strategy in the subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother*. The following subchapters will discuss the translation strategies in more detail illustrated with examples from my material.

5.2. Retention of Humor

In this subchapter, examples of retentive translation strategy used in the transfer of humor in *How I Met Your Mother* are presented. When a translation is exoticizing and historicizing, it is considered as *retention*, in other words, retentive translation strategy stays close to the source text and reveals the foreign origin in the target text (Holmes 1988: 47). In this study, translation strategy is categorized as retention of humor if the translator has preserved the humor of the source text in the subtitles without changing the original type of humor. A total of 52 out of 140 instances of verbal humor were retained in the target text. Retentive translation strategy was more frequently used strategy than re-creation since 37% of the source text humor was retained in the Finnish subtitles. In the target text, there are five types of verbal humor that contained retention. These types are polysemy, paronymy, homonymy, nonce words allusive pun and pure allusion. The only type of humor in my material that did not contain retention was homophony. What follows are the examples of each retained type of humor.

The first example shows a case of retained polysemy which is play on a word with several meanings (Delabastita 1996: 128). Polysemy was retained in 26/46 cases. In this scene, Ted and Robin are going to a wedding together. Both of them are dressed elegantly.

(14) S1E12 ST:

Robin: Wow yourself. Look who else **brought it**.

Ted: Oh yeah, thought about leaving it at home, but I figured - I don't wanna get there and realize I need it and have to go all the way back to get it. So yeah, I **brought it**.

SUB:

Robin: Samat sanat. Sinullakin on **ykköset**.

[Right back at you. You're wearing number ones as well.]

Ted: Ajattelin jotakin muuta numeroa, mutta en halua ottaa riskiä - joten panin **ykköset**.

[I was thinking about a different number, but I didn't want to take a risk – so I wore number ones.]

Ted compliments Robyn's dress and Robyn returns the compliment with '*Look who else brought it.*' Wordplay occurs when Ted talks about literally bringing something with him. Humor is thus based on the polysemy of the phrase *brought it*. In the subtitles the translator retains the humor by using a polysemy of the word *ykköset* in Finnish, which signifies number one or wearing one's most festive outfit. Robyn refers to Ted's suit with her comment and Ted replies that first he was thinking about a different number but decided to wear his *ykköset* as well.

The following example shows a case of retained paronymy which is play on words with similar but not identical pronunciation and spelling (Delabastita 1996: 128). Paronymy was retained in 5/31 cases. In this scene, it is New Year's Eve. The entire group is in a limousine on their way to a party. Barney has brought unknown girls with him. Lily is being polite and tries to get to know one of the girls. She small talks with Natalya and asks where she is from.

(15) S1E11 ST:

Lily: So where are you from Natalya?

Barney: She.. Who knows? **The former Soviet Republic of Drunk-Off-Her-Ass-Istan?**

SUB:

Lily: Mistä olet kotoisin?

[Where are you from?]

Barney: Kuka tietää? **Perseetolallastanin tasavallasta?**

[Who knows? From the republic of Drunk-Off-Her-Ass-tan?]

Barney interrupts their talk by paronymously commenting that she is possibly from *the former Soviet Republic of Drunk-Off-Her-Ass-Istan*. This comment can refer to whichever former Soviet Union Republic ending with –istan such as the former Soviet Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan. In the subtitles the translator has retained the paronymy by translating *the former Soviet Republic of Drunk-Off-Her-Ass-Istan* as *Perseetollastanin tasavalta*. This can, for instance, be a paronymy of Pakistanin tasavalta [the Republic of Pakistan].

This is an example of retained homonymy which is play on words with identical pronunciation and spelling (Delabastita 1996: 128). Homonymy was retained in 50% of the cases. In this scene, Barney explains to his friends that he is convinced that someone is sabotaging his life. There have been several incidents where a mysterious woman has sabotaged Barney's attempts to seduce other women and now he has to narrow down a group of 64 women who have a reason to hate him.

(16) S3E14 ST:

Barney: Some woman that I slept with and screwed over is trying to ruin my life. God, why is this happening to me?

Lily: It's **karma**.

Barney: Nah, it's not **Karma**. She's stripping in Vegas. Plus, we're good.

SUB:

Barney: Joku kellistämäni ja pettämäni nainen yrittää pilata elämäni.
Miksi tämä tapahtuu minulle?

[Some woman I had sex with and cheated on tries to ruin my life. Why is this happening to me?]

Lily: Se on **karma**.

[It's karma.]

Barney: Ei se ole **Karma**. Hän strippaa Vegasissa. Ja olemme väleissä.

[It's not Karma. She is stripping in Vegas. And we are on good terms.]

Wordplay in the form of homonymy occurs when Lily suggests to Barney that *karma* is catching up to him and Barney misunderstands that Lily is talking about a stripper in Vegas called *Karma*. The same wordplay works in Finnish as well, and the translator retained the same homonymy in the subtitles by first spelling *karma* with a small initial letter and then *Karma* with a capital letter thus making it a name.

This example shows a case of retention of a nonce word. Nonce words are words invented for a specific occasion (Schröter 2005: 267). Nonce words were retained in 10/16 cases. In this scene, it is Thanksgiving Eve and the group is at a pub. Lily and Marshall are about to host their first Thanksgiving as a married couple. The group is discussing their Thanksgiving schedule but Marshall has something special planned for Barney. A year earlier, Marshall made a bet with Barney and won the right to slap him five times. Marshall has already used two of the slaps and now he is planning to execute the third slap during Thanksgiving. Marshall has tortured Barney the whole day with accidentally saying Slapsgiving instead of Thanksgiving and now he reveals his plan to the group. Barney will have to spend the entire Thanksgiving worrying about when the slap will happen.

(17) S3E9 ST:

Marshall: Oh, hey, by the way, if anyone wants to come over early Thursday, we can watch the **Slapsgiving day** parade.

Barney: Well, there, you said it again.

Marshall: Said what?

Barney: Slapsgiving.

Marshall: Oh, I guess I did. You know why? I've invented a new holiday: **Slapsgiving**. It's the one day we set aside each year to gather together and give slaps.

SUB:

Marshall: Jos joku haluaa tulla aikaisin torstaina voimme katsoa **läpsäyspäivän** paraatia.

[If anyone wants to come early on Thursday, we can watch the Slapsgiving day parade.]

Barney: Siinä. sanoit sen taas.

[There, you said it again.]

Marshall: Sanoin mitä?

[Said what?]

Barney: Läpsäyspäivä.

[Slapsgiving.]

Marshall: Niin taisin sanoa. Tiedätkö miksi? Olen keksinyt uuden pyhäpäivän, **läpsäyspäivän**. Yksi päivä vuodessa, kun kokoontumme ja läpsimme toisiamme.

[I guess I did. You know why? I've invented a new holiday, Slapsgiving. One day a year when we gather together and slap each other.]

Slapsgiving is a nonce word created by Marshall. *Slapsgiving* is adapted from Thanksgiving. The translator has retained the nonce word of the source text by adapting a nonce word called *läpsäyspäivä* from the word kiitospäivä.

The following is an example of retained allusive pun. Allusive puns are modified allusion which contain wordplay (Leppihalme 1997: 10). Allusive puns were retained in 4/14 cases. In this scene, it is Halloween and Ted is dressed as a hanging chad, as can be seen in the picture (picture 2) below. Robyn arrives to his house and comments on Ted's costume.

(18) S1E6 ST:

Robin: Hey **Chad, how's it hanging?**

Ted: Hey, word play. Funny.

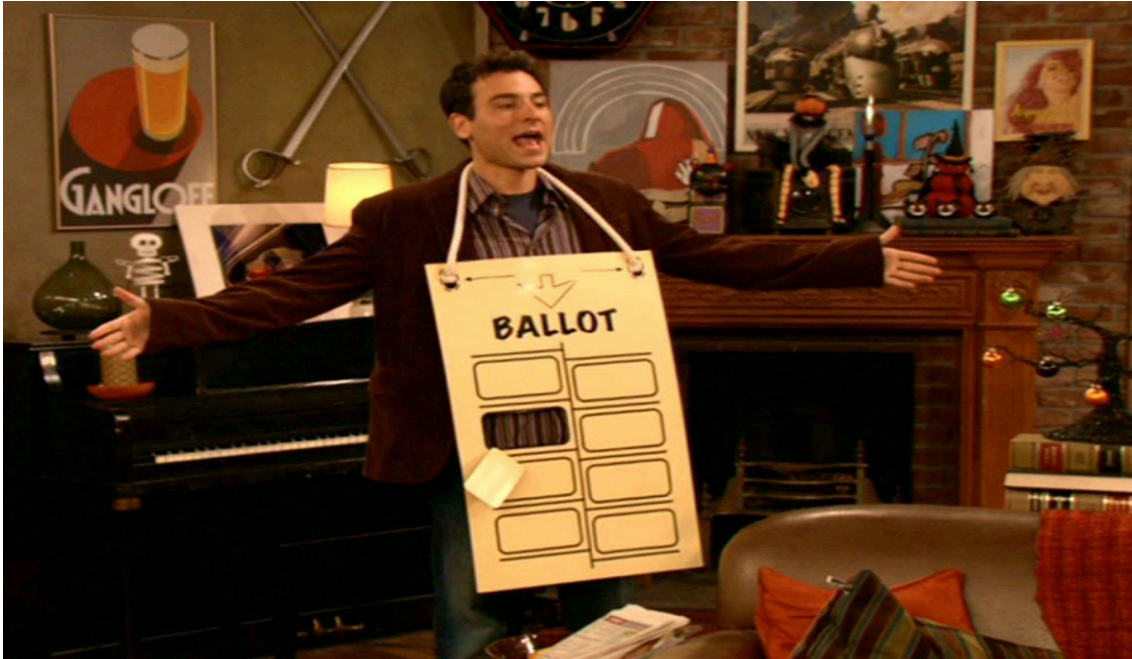
SUB:

Robin: **Vaadin tarkistuslaskentaa.**

[I demand a recount.]

Ted: Hauskaa.

[Funny.]



Picture 2. Ted dressed as a *Hanging Chad*

According to US Legal definitions (2016), *Hanging Chad* is a chad that is not completely detached from the ballot. A chad is a small piece of paper that is punched from a ballot using a punch-type mechanical voting machine. When there is a hanging chad, that vote may not be counted correctly. Chad was made infamous in the highly polemic United States presidential election in the year 2000, where many of Florida votes used votomatic punched card ballots. In this scene, Robyn makes an allusive pun and refers to Ted's costume, hanging chad, by greeting him with *Chad, how's it hanging*. The translator of the subtitle retains the allusion of Robin's line by translating it as '*I demand a recount*'. Which refers to a hanging chad not being able to be counted correctly.

This last example demonstrates a retained pure allusion containing a proper-name. Pure allusions are unmodified allusions (Leppihalme 1997: 10). Pure allusions were retained in 6/25 cases. In this scene, Barney and Ted are at the pub and Barney has promised to

be Ted's wingman that is to find girls for him. Ted meets a girl who is dressed like a rock 'n roll star. Barney does not approve of her and tries to get rid of her. In return, the girl tells Barney to leave.

(19) S3E1 ST:

Barney: Wow. Wow. Great stuff, **Tommy Lee**. See what you don't understand is, I'm Ted's wingman. It's a sacred bond, much stronger than any... They're making out again!

SUB:

Barney: Hyvä piikki, **Tommy Lee**. Ymmärrätkö, että olen Tedin tukimies? Tukijan ja tuetun välinen suhde kestää... Lääppiminen jatkuu.

[A great comeback Tommy Lee. Do you understand that I'm Ted's wingman? The relationship between the supporter and the supported lasts... Making out continues.]

Pure allusion occurs when Barney gets mad and refers to her as *Tommy Lee* who is the drummer of the rock band *Mötley Crüe*. The translator retains the same pure allusion in the subtitles since *Tommy Lee* is a well-known person in Finland as well.

This subchapter has demonstrated the use of retentive translation strategy with six examples from my material. Retention of humor turned out to be the second most favored translation strategy in the subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother* and clearly more frequently used strategy than re-creation of humor which is the focus of the following subchapter.

5.3. Re-creation of Humor

In this subchapter, examples of the use of re-creative translation strategy in the transfer of verbal humor in *How I Met Your Mother* are presented. When a translation is naturalizing and modernizing, it is considered as *re-creation*, in other words, re-creative strategy brings the translation closer to the target culture and thus allows the translator to be more creative in the translation process (Holmes 1988: 47). In order for a translation strategy to be categorized as re-creation of humor, the humor of the source text has to be translated by using a different type of humor than the original that is the

translation has to be creative. Re-creation of humor turned out to be the least utilized translation strategy in the subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother*. The table (table 2) below illustrates the re-creation of humor in the Finnish subtitles of *How I Met Your Mother* along with retention. Only 7 instances of verbal humor out of 140 were transferred to the target text by using re-creation of humor. All of these instances were re-created by using one of the main types of verbal humor found in this study. In my material, only three types of verbal humor contained re-creation of humor. Wordplay's subcategory paronymy contained the most instances of re-creation with three re-created instances, two of which were re-created with polysemy and one was re-created with a nonce word. In addition, two instances of pure allusion were re-created, one was re-created with polysemy and one with paronymy. Homophony contained two instances of re-creation as well, both of which were re-created with polysemy.

Table 2. Re-creation of humor in subtitling *How I Met Your Mother*

Subtitling ST/TT	Polys.	Homon.	Homoph.	Paron.	Nonce Words	All. Pun	Pure All.
Polysemy	26	0	0	0	0	0	0
Homonymy	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Homophony	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paronymy	2	0	0	5	1	0	0
Nonce Words	0	0	0	0	10	0	0
Allusive Pun	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
Pure Allusion	1	0	0	1	0	0	5
TOTAL RE-CREATION	5	0	0	1	1	0	0

The following example shows a case of re-creation of pure allusion containing a proper-name. Pure allusions were re-created in 2/25 cases. In this scene, Lily has left Ted stranded by the side of the road in Dutchess County. He calls Robin for help and she promises to give him a ride home. When Robin arrives, she is wearing a huge woolen hat to cover up her hair. Ted immediately starts making fun of the hat.

(20) S1E21 ST:

Ted: I like your hat.

Robin: Right. This is embarrassing. **I got highlights.**

Ted: Oh, for the waiting room of your dental practice?

SUB:

Ted: Hieno myssy.

[Nice hat.]

Robin: **Otin raitoja.**

[I took highlights.]

Ted: Kylpyhuoneessa? Viivoiksikin niitä sanotaan.

[In the bathroom? One could also call them as lines.]

When Robin tells that she has gotten highlights, Ted makes an allusion to an American children's magazine called *Highlights* by joking that she got them for the waiting room of a dental practice. The translator has re-created the humor of this scene with the help of polysemy. She uses the word *viiva* [line] as a meaning for highlights and a line of drugs. When Robin tells she has got *raitoja* [highlights], Ted jokes that one could also call them as *viivoiksi* [lines], thus implying that Robin has been sniffing lines of drugs in the bathroom.

The following example shows a case of re-creation of paronymy. Paronymy was re-created in 3/31 cases. In this scene, Robin has called Ted in the middle of the night and asked him to come over and make juice with her. They have broken up a while ago but they are trying to remain friends. Their relationship is quite awkward and they do not

know how to act around each other. Ted arrives to Robin's house with a bag full of vegetables but Robin suggests that they drink wine instead.

(21) S1E18 ST:

Ted: Hi. Um, I got some vegetables. I got carrots, I got beets.

Robin: Or we could just drink wine.

Ted: **Wine not?** Well, that's the stupidest thing I've ever said.

SUB:

Ted: Toin mukanani vihanneksia.

[I brought vegetables with me.]

Robin: Voimme juoda viiniäkin.

[We can also drink wine.]

Ted: **Viinitellään.** Tuo on typerintä, mitä olen sanonut.

[Let's wine. That's the stupidest thing I've said.]

The wordplay of this scene occurs when Ted tries to lighten up the mood with the help of paronymy. He replies with *wine not* instead of why not. The translator has recreated the humor of this scene by using a nonce word *viinitellään* instead of paronymy.

This example demonstrates re-creation of homophony which is play on words with identical pronunciation but different spelling (Delabastita 1996: 128). Homophony was re-created in 2/6 cases. In this scene, Lily announces to Robin that she has, yet again, found a perfect man for her. The others are skeptic because Lily is notoriously famous for only telling the good qualities of these dates and leaving out their major flaws. Ted immediately asks what is his 'but'. Robin defends Lily by reminding Ted about his successful date with Jamie.

(22) S3E4 ST:

Robin: Hey, you know what, not every setup has a 'but'. What about, um, Jamie, that girl that Lily set you up with? She was really nice.

Barney: If memory serves me, she had a huge **'but'**. Her huge **butt**.
Nailed it!

SUB:

Robin: Ei niissä aina huonoja puolia ole. Se Jamiekin oli todella mukava.

[They don't always have a bad side. That Jamie was really nice.]

Barney: Yksi juttu hänessä oli **hanurista**. Hänen **hanurinsa** oli valtava.

[One thing about her was from the accordion. Her huge accordion.]

The wordplay of this scene occurs when Barney joins the conversation and makes a humorous comment with the help of homophony. According to him, Jamie had a huge but, her huge butt. The translator has recreated this pun by using polysemous word *hanuri* [accordion]. In Finnish language there is a saying *olla hanurista* [something is from the accordion]. This means that something is bad. In addition, the word *hanuri* [accordion] is a metaphor for buttocks.

This subchapter has demonstrated the use of re-creation as a translation strategy with three examples from my material. Re-creation was the least frequently used translation strategy since merely 5% of the verbal humor was re-created in the subtitling of *How I Met Your Mother*. The following subchapter focuses on the most frequently used translation strategy in this material; loss of humor.

5.4. Loss of Humor

In this subchapter examples of a use of loss of humor as a translation strategy in *How I Met Your Mother* are presented. In this study, translation strategy was categorized as lost if the instance of humor could not be successfully transferred into the Finnish subtitles that is the instance was no longer humorous. Loss of humor turned out to be the most dominant translation strategy utilized by the translators. A total of 72 instances of verbal humor out of 140 were lost. All seven types of humor in my material contained loss of humor. Five of these are wordplay: homonymy, homophony, polysemy, paronymy and nonce words. Two are allusion in the form of pure allusion and allusive pun.

The first example shows a case of lost homonymy. Homonymy was lost in 50% of the cases. In this scene, Barney is at a Halloween party dressed as the devil and is trying to seduce girls. He is talking to a girl and offers to make her a drink.

(23) S1E6 ST:

Girl: You certainly are a charming devil.

Barney: I'm also **a horny devil**.

SUB:

Girl: Oletkin hurmaava paholainen.

[You are a charming devil.]

Barney: Minulla on myös **sarvet, joilla tökkiä**.

[I also have horns that I can poke with.]

Wordplay of this scene occurs when Barney uses a homonym *horny* to refer both to the horns of his Halloween costume and being sexually aroused. The subtitler stays loyal to Barney's shameless character by translating the homonymy as I also have horns that I can poke with. This insinuates that Barney is not a charming devil after all. This was a clever translation, but the wordplay is lost from the subtitles, and thus the translation is categorized as loss of humor.

The following example demonstrates a case of lost homophony. Homophony was lost in 2/6 cases. In this episode, Robin is taking Ted and Barney to an exclusive club. The owner of the club is a fan of her reporting for Metro News One and has promised to put her on the list for tonight. He has even promised to get her to the VIP room. They get in the club but turns out Robin can't get into the VIP room. She steps outside to call the owner and after the phone call the doorman won't let her back in. In this scene, Robin sits on the curb of the sidewalk when Lily arrives to join the party.

(24) S1E5 ST:

Robin: I get recognized one time and I start thinking I'm Julia Roberts. I'm no VIP. I'm not even an IP. **I'm just a lonely little P, sitting out here in the gutter.**

Lily: You know something. I'd take a P in the gutter over Julia Roberts any time.

SUB:

Robin: Minut tunnistettiin kerran, ja kuvittelin olevani Julia Roberts. En ole VIP, en edes IP. **Olen vain tavallinen P, joka istuu katujassa.**

[I was recognized once and I started thinking I'm Julia Roberts. I'm not VIP, not even IP. I'm just a normal P who sits in the gutter.]

Lily: Tiedätkö mitä? Pidän enemmän P: stä katujassa kuin Julia Robertsista.

[You know what? I prefer P in the gutter to Julia Roberts.]

The humor of this scene is caused by Lily's comment about *taking a P in the gutter over Julia Roberts any time*. By P Lily refers to her friend Robin, but a letter P and a word pee are homophones, and thus it sounds like Lily would take a pee in the gutter over Julia Roberts. In the subtitles, the wordplay of the source text is lost since the translator has merely translated this line directly into Finnish. The translation does not contain homophony or wordplay and therefore it has no humorous effect on a viewer. Thus, the translation is categorized as loss of humor.

The following example shows a case of lost polysemy. Polysemy was lost in 19/46 cases. In this episode, Robin has started to date a man who is notably older than her and Ted doesn't approve of him. It is Thanksgiving and Robin has invited Bob to join their Thanksgiving dinner. Ted is constantly criticizing Bob and Robin insinuates that Ted is jealous of him.

(25) S3E9 ST:

Ted: The only reason I'm jealous of Bob is because I heard **Noah gave him shotgun in the ark.**

SUB:

Ted: Olen mustasukkainen, koska Nooa antoi hänelle **haulikon arkissa.**

[I'm jealous because Noah gave him a (shot)gun in the ark.]

In this scene, Ted responds humorously by implying that Bob is so old that *Noah gave him a shotgun in the ark*. The word *shotgun* has acquired several meanings and thus it can mean a gun or the front seat of a vehicle, in this case Ted means the front seat of the ark. This wordplay is lost in the subtitles since the translator has not been familiar with this polyseme and has translated the front seat as a shotgun.

This is an example of lost paronymy. Paronymy was lost in 22/31 cases and thus contains the highest share of loss of humor, along with allusive puns, out of all the types of humor in this study. In this scene, Ted and Barney are at a Halloween party on a rooftop and Barney is dressed as a penguin. Barney thinks the party is boring and he tries to convince Ted to leave with him and join another party. Ted refuses to leave because he hopes to meet a girl from last year's Halloween party. As Barney leaves, he puts his flipper up towards Ted, as can be seen in the picture (picture3) below.

(26) S1E06 ST:

Ted: What are you doing?

Barney: I'm **flippering you off**.

SUB:

Ted: Mitä sinä teet?

[What are you doing?]

Barney: **Näytän räpylää.**

[I'm showing a flipper.]



Picture 3. Barney flippering Ted off

Barney is showing Ted his middle finger under his penguin suit as he leaves the party. In other words, he is flipping him off, which is a colloquial way to describe this action. Barney creates wordplay in the form of paronym as he says to Ted that he is *flippering him off* since it has a similar pronunciation and spelling with *flipping someone off*. Moreover, it refers humorously to the flippers of his penguin costume. The translation contains no wordplay and therefore it is deemed as loss of humor.

The next example presents two lost allusive puns. Allusive puns were lost 10/14 cases, and along with paronymy it is a category of humor with most lost instances of verbal humor. In this episode, Robin's news report has been nominated for an award in Local Area Media News Awards and she has invited all her friends to the party. Ted and Robin have recently broken up and they are trying to make each other jealous by bringing last minute dates to the awards. Ted is on a date with an escort who pretends to be a paralegal and Robin is on a date with her unbearably irritating and selfish co-anchor from the news, Sandy Rivers. Ted and Robin are not getting along and they start arguing at the party.

(27) S1E19 ST:

Ted: You don't return my calls, we never hang out and now you're trying to make me jealous by waving **Edward R. Moron** in my face?

Robin: Oh, and **Paralegally Blonde** isn't here in her low-cut dress to make me jealous?

SUB:

Ted: Et ikinä soita ja nyt yrität tehdä minut mustasukkaiseksi **ääliöllä**.

[You never call and now you're trying to make me jealous with this moron.]

Robin: Entä **vähäpukeinen blondisi**?

[What about your skimpily dressed blonde?]

In this scene, Ted is accusing Robin of trying to make him jealous by bringing Sandy as her date. He makes an allusion to Edward R. Murrow who was a valued American television and news broadcaster. He replaces Edward's last name Murrow with *Moron* and thus insinuates that Sandy is anything but an intelligent and valued news broadcaster. Robin fires back and calls Ted's date *paralegally blonde*, thus making an allusion to a hit movie called *Legally Blond* (in Finnish *Blondin kosto* [revenge of the blond]). In the movie Reese Witherspoon plays a beautiful blond law student in Harvard who struggles to be taken seriously by her peers because of her appearance. Ted's date, in her low-cut dress, resembles considerably this character from the movie. There are no allusions for these movies in the subtitles and therefore they are deemed as lost.

This example shows a case of lost pure allusion containing a proper-name. Pure allusions were lost in 13/25 cases, in percentages that is 52%. In this episode, it is Saint Patrick's Day and Barney is wearing a green suit. He walks into Ted and Marshall's apartment.

(28) S3E12 ST:

Marshall: That's **Gumpy**. Hey Gumby, can we tie you in a knot later?

SUB:

Marshall: Hei vaan **pieni vihreä mies**. Voimmeko pistää sinut solmuun?

[Hey, little green man. Can we tie you in a knot?]

In this scene, Marshall greets him with an allusion to an American clay animation figure *Gumby*, who is a green clay humanoid that can be molded into every kind of shape. The pure allusion to *Gumpy* has been lost since the translator replaced it with *pieni vihreä mies* [little green man] and thus, the translation is categorized as loss of humor.

The last example shows a case of lost nonce word. Nonce words were lost in 5/16 cases. In this episode, Robin is dating sports anchor Curt, her colleague from the Metro News One. One the set of the news Robin starts to realize that Curt is quite an oppressive person. Curt sulks because he is upset that Robin forgot to call him last night although she promised to call.

(29) S3E11 ST:

Curt : I'm sorry Sweetie. I don't want to fight tonight. It's our first **weekiversary**

SUB:

Curt: Kulta rakas. Ei tapella tänä iltana. Tänään **olemme seurustelleet viikon**.

[Darling. Let's not fight tonight. Today we have been dating for a week.]

In this scene, Robin apologizes and Curt hugs her and says he doesn't want to fight because it's their first *weekiversary*. *Weekiversary* is a nonce word that combines words *week* and *anniversary*. The translator has replaced this invented word with a neutral translation: *Tänään olemme seurustelleet viikon* [Today we have been dating for a week]. Thus, the nonce word is lost from the subtitles.

This subchapter has demonstrated the use of loss of humor as a translation strategy with seven examples from my material. As was mentioned earlier, loss of humor turned out to be the most prominent translation strategy used in the translation of verbal humor in *How I Met Your Mother*. The following subchapter focuses on the last and fourth translation strategy, omission of humor.

5.5. Omission of Humor

In this chapter examples of a use of omission of humor as a translation strategy are presented. In this study, a completely untranslated instance of humor was categorized as omission of humor. Omission of humor turned out to be the second least frequently used translation strategy in the subtitles of *How I Met Your Mother*. Only nine instances out of 140 instances of verbal humor were omitted. Omission of humor was found from five humor categories: homophony, nonce word, pure allusion, paronymy, and polysemy.

The first example shows a case of omission of homophony. Homophony was omitted in 2/6 cases. In this scene, Ted and Barney are in Philadelphia. They flew there from New York because they met two girls at the airport. In the airplane they found out that both of the girls already have boyfriends. When the plane landed to Philadelphia they were arrested because they acted suspiciously at the airport in New York since they abandoned their suitcases and purchased last minute tickets with cash. They are being released from the interrogations, and Ted wants to fly back home, but Barney insists that they go to Sacha's house for drinks. Sacha is a female officer who interrogated Barney at the airport.

(30) S1E3 ST:

Ted: Who the hell is Sacha?

Barney: Sacha. She's having friends over for drinks at her house. It's gonna be **legen** ...wait for it...**and I hope you're not lactose intolerant 'cuz the second half of that word is...dairy!**

SUB:

Ted: Kuka hän on?

[Who is she?]

Barney: Sascha! Hän on kutsunut kavereita drinkeille kotiinsa. Siitä tulee **legen...**

...ja toinen osa sanaa on...daarista!

[Sascha! She has invited friends over to her home for drinks. It's going to be legen

...and the other part of the word is...dary!]

Throughout the series, Barney frequently uses a catchphrase: “It’s gonna be legen...and wait for it...dary.” In this scene, Barney modifies his catchphrase and adds a line: *and I hope you're not lactose intolerant*. This addition creates a pun containing a homophone since the last part of the word *legendary* now sounds like *dairy* instead of *dary* because they have identical pronunciation. The translator has omitted Barney’s line *and I hope you're not lactose intolerant* entirely from the subtitles and replaced it with Barney’s usual catchphrase: Siitä tulee legen...ja toinen osa sanaa on...daarista! [It’s going to be legen...and the other part of the word is...dary!]. Reduction of the original dialog was evident since subtitling has strict spatial restrictions. Hence, the wordplay of Barney’s line has been omitted in the translation.

The following example shows a case of omitted nonce word. Nonce words were omitted in 1/16 cases. In this episode, Robin does a story on a matchmaking service called Love Solutions. Robin and Barney recommend Ted to try out their service. The woman in charge of the service convinces Ted that she can find him a soul mate in three days. After five days Ted has not heard back from the Love Solutions and he is getting very anxious. He is afraid that the service can’t find a single match for him.

(31) S1E8 ST:

Lily: Oh, just play it cool. **Don’t Ted-out about it.**

Ted: Did you just use my name as a verb?

Barney: Oh, yeah, we do that behind your back. **Ted-out**: to overthink.
Also see Ted-up. **Ted-up**: to overthink something with disastrous results.

SUB:

Lily: Ota rauhallisesti. **Älä tedaile.**

[Take it easy. Don’t ted-out.]

Ted: Teitkö nimestäni verbin?

[Did you make a verb out of my name?]

Barney: Teemme niin selkäsi takana. **Tedailla**: pohtia liikaa, usein katastrofiaalisin seurauksin.

[We do that behind your back. Ted-out: to overthink, often with catastrophic results.]

In this scene, Lily tells him to calm down and not to *Ted-out*, that is, to overthink something. *Ted-out* is a verb invented by Ted's friends to describe his habit of overanalyzing everything. In addition, Ted's friends use another verb *Ted-up* to describe Ted's overthinking with disastrous results. The translator has used a retentive translation strategy with the first verb, *Ted-out*, and invented a verb *tedailla* for the Finnish subtitles. She has translated *Don't Ted-out about it* as *Älä tedaile* [Don't ted-out]. The second verb *Ted-up*, the translator has omitted completely. She has combined the meanings of both of the verbs together and translated Barney's line as *Tedailla: pohtia liikaa, usein katastrofiaalisin seurauksin* [Ted-out: to overthink, often with catastrophic results]. This was a clever strategy since the translator does not have to create a second nonce word for the subtitles.

The next example presents an omission of a pure allusion containing a key-phrase. Pure allusions were omitted in 4/25 cases. In this episode, it is Halloween and Lily and Marshall are very excited about their costumes. Marshall is dressed as Jack Sparrow and Lily as a green parrot. They hope to win the costume contest at the bar and win the prize of a \$50 gift certificate. They are at the bar taking pictures of them selves and notice that only a few people are in costumes. They are certain that they are going to win. Marshall reminisces a Halloween competition four years ago when they were dressed as an American pop music duo Sonny and Cher. Lily was dressed as Sonny and Marshall as Cher. That year they didn't win the costume competition.

(32) S1E6 ST:

Marshall: I still think we should have won as Sonny and Cher. Maybe if I had worn that red dress. Ha! **If I could turn back time.**

SUB:

Marshall: Olisimme ehkä voittaneet Sonnyna ja Cherinä, jos olisin ollut punaisissa.

[We might have won if I had worn red.]

In this scene, Marshall says to Lily that they might have won the costume competition if he had worn a red dress and he wishes he could turn back time and change his outfit. At the same time he makes a clever reference to Cher's hit song *Turn Back Time*. In the subtitles the line *Ha! If I could turn back time* has been omitted completely from the Finnish translation. This was probably done by mistake, since it would have been easy to translate the line by using, for instance, loss of humor as a translation strategy. The translation is categorized as omission of humor since the allusion is omitted from the subtitles.

The following example demonstrates an omitted paronymy. Paronymy was omitted 1/31 in cases. In this episode, it is Saint Patrick's Day and Lily, Marshall, Robin and Ted have decided to spend the evening at Lily and Marshall's new unfurnished apartment playing board games. They arrive at the apartment and Lily rushes to check if the last owners have left something behind. Meanwhile Marshall hangs up a painting on the wall in the living room, but for some reason, it doesn't stay straight. Robin notices that the new apartment is crooked. Marshall convinces Robin to keep it a secret from Lily because they have spent their entire savings on that crooked apartment. Lily finds a skate board from one of the rooms and as it slides across the living room floor by its self, the secret comes out. Lily is devastated.

(33) S3E12 ST:

Lily: We can't raise our kids here. They'll grow up slanted.

Marshall: If we have a daughter, we'll have to call her **Eileen**.

SUB:

Lily: Jos kasvatamme lapset täällä, heistä tulee kaltevia.

Marshall: -

In this scene, Marshall tries to console Lily with humorous wordplay. He says that if they have a daughter, they will have to call her Eileen because of the leaning floor. Eileen is a paronym for I lean since they have similar but not identical pronunciation and spelling. The translator has omitted Marshall's entire line completely from the

Finnish subtitles. The translator probably decided to omit the line because other translation strategies would have been too challenging and time-consuming to execute.

The last example of this thesis shows a case of omitted polysemy. Polysemy was omitted in 1/46 cases. In this episode, Ted has met an interesting woman at a friend's wedding last night but he doesn't know her name. He is desperate to find out the name and contact her. All Ted knows is that the woman was one of the bridesmaid's friends. Barney attended the wedding as well and he spent a night with the bridesmaid. In this scene, Ted and Lily decide to call Barney and ask him to call the bridesmaid in order to find out the secret identity of Ted's crush. Barney explains to Ted and Lily that he never calls back to the girls he meets and refuses to call back to her.

(34) S1E13 ST:

Lily: Oh, come on, Barney. It's for a good cause.

Barney: Ted going all castrati over another girl is exactly not a good cause. Sorry, buddy, I wish I could help you, **my hands are tied. Oh no, wait, that was last night.**

SUB:

Lily: Tarkoitus on hyvä.

[It's for a good cause.]

Barney: Ted leikkii kastroattilaulajaa naisen takia. Se ei ole hyvä tarkoitus. Käteni ovat sidotut.

[Ted plays a castrati singer because of a woman. It's not for a good cause. My hands are tied.]

Barney does not make exceptions to his rule, and emphasizes his words by using an idiom: *my hands are tied* – meaning he cannot help Ted to figure out the identity of the woman. After the line *my hands are tied*, Barney adds: *Oh no, wait, that was last night* and thus creates a polysemic meaning for the idiom. He insinuates that his hands were literally tied last night. This polyseme has been completely omitted from the Finnish subtitles and therefore it has been categorized as omission of humor. This was probably done by mistake since the same polysemy would work in Finnish as well.

This last subchapter has demonstrated the use of omission of humor as a translation strategy with five examples from my material. As was mentioned earlier omission of humor was the least frequently used translation strategy after re-creation. The following and last chapter of this study presents the conclusion.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesis of this study was that the retentive translation strategy would be more frequently used than the re-creative translation strategy in the translation of verbal humor in *How I Met Your Mother*. This was based on the assumption that subtitling as a form of audiovisual translation does not offer as much freedom for the translator to be creative than for example dubbing offers, because subtitling is less prone to censorship since the original soundtrack remains unaltered, and viewers who understand the source language have a possibility to examine the translation in terms of textual loyalty. As a result, the translator might prefer using retentive translation strategy instead of re-creative translation strategy when transferring verbal humor from the original dialog to the subtitles.

In order to analyze, how the verbal humor had been transferred from the source text into the target text, the most typical types of verbal humor found from *How I Met Your Mother* were identified. Two categories of humor arose as the most significant means of creating verbal humor in the series: wordplay and allusions. Wordplay was further divided into five subcategories of polysemy, homonymy, homophony, paronymy and nonce words. Allusions were further divided into two subcategories of allusive puns and pure allusions. In order to investigate whether my hypothesis was correct, the translation strategies used by the translators of *How I Met Your Mother* were divided into categories of retention and re-creation on the grounds of how the verbal humor was translated. In this study, translation strategy was categorized as retention of humor if the translator had preserved the humor of the source text in the subtitles without changing the original type of humor. On the other hand, for a translation strategy to be categorized as re-creation of humor, the humor of the source text had to be translated by using a different type of humor than the original. In addition to retention and re-creation of humor, also loss of humor and omission of humor were included in the translation strategies of this study, because some humor was bound to be impossible to transfer from the source text to the subtitles. In case the humor had not been transferred successfully to the subtitles, in other words if the instance was no longer humorous, it

was categorized as loss of humor. A completely untranslated instance of humor was categorized as omission of humor.

Wordplay was the most typical type of humor in the source text of *How I Met Your Mother*. There were 101 instances of wordplay found from the source text. The second most typical type of humor was allusions. There were 39 instances of allusions found from the source text. These types of humor were respected in the translation since they were the most typical types of humor in the target text as well. Wordplay was the most typical type of humor with 42 instances and allusions the second most typical type of humor with 10 instances. In addition, all of the types of humor had been either transferred or untransferred from the source text to the target text by utilizing one of the four translation strategies. Transferred humor was either retained or re-created and untransferred humor was either lost or omitted.

Retention of humor was found out to be the clearly more frequently used translation strategy than re-creation of humor thus proving my hypothesis correct. A total of 37% of the verbal humor in the series was transferred into the subtitles using the retentive translation strategy. Polysemy was the largest category of verbal humor in the source text and the translators were able to retain 57% of it in the target text. Thus, polysemy turned out to be the second most effortlessly transferring type of verbal humor. This is due to the fact that polysemy is common in both languages. In the category of nonce words retention was the dominant translation strategy with 63% of all of the instances retained. Thus, nonce words transferred from the source text to the subtitles more effortlessly than any other type of verbal humor in this study. This might be explained by the fact that nonce words are words created for a single occasion, and creating those words is equally common in both languages. In the transfer of allusions, allusive puns had a higher tendency to be retained than pure allusions, which is somewhat surprising since allusive puns challenge the translator with both linguistic and cultural material. Because of this double challenge, one would assume that the results would be the other way around since pure allusions challenge the translator only with cultural material. I assume that this happened because the translators consumed more time and effort in

translating the more challenging type of allusions than pure allusions. Consequently, the allusive puns had a higher tendency to be retained.

Re-creative translation strategy turned out to be the least frequently used translation strategy. Merely 5% of the verbal humor was transferred using the re-creative translation strategy. Overall in the translation of wordplay and allusions, loss of humor was surprisingly the most frequently used translation strategy. This can be explained with vast syntactical and semantical differences between English and Finnish languages. In addition, subtitling as a mode of audiovisual translation contains restrictions of space and time that are bound to influence the transfer of humor. Reduction of the original dialog is evident because of these restrictions and therefore, some humor is bound to be lost in the process. A half of the source text humor was lost in the translation of which 68% were wordplay and 32% were allusions. The substantial loss of wordplay and allusions can be explained with the fact that Finnish words do not move easily from one word class to another, as in English, and thus are not as common in Finnish. Omission was the second least favored translation strategy used in translating wordplay and allusions. Wordplay contained 5% of completely omitted verbal humor and allusion contained 10% of completely omitted humor.

The translators were able to transfer 42% the source text humor into the subtitles of *How I Met Your Mother*. A total of 81 out of 140 instances of source text humor could not be successfully transferred into the subtitles. This means that in percentages as much as 58% of the source text humor remained untransferred. These results seem to support the common opinion that humor does not travel easily between two completely different languages. The translators of *How I Met Your Mother* proved it to be possible but extremely challenging.

Suggestions for further studies would be, for instance, to compare the transfer of verbal humor between two target texts, for example Finnish and German, in order to see if a language related to English could transfer more verbal humor than Finnish. One could also conclude more types of humor to the study in order to make it a more encompassing comparison of which type of humor can be transferred most effortlessly into the target text.

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